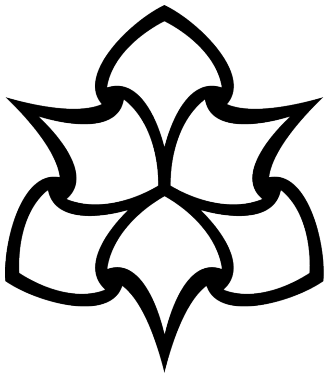

Understanding Material and Content in Made Things, with particular reference to the art medal

Benedict Andrew Carpenter

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Volume I – Text
Volume II – Images

Design Research Group,
Manchester School of Art Research Centre,
Manchester School of Art

January 2019

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Abstract

This research investigates the relationship of material and content in art and craft practices to ask not *what* things mean but *how* they mean. The principal object of analysis is the art medal, a form of small-scale, biface sculpture, normally bearing portrait images that was developed in fifteenth century Italy, and that is still practiced today, worldwide. Through the close analysis of a number of art medals, this research investigates the way in which materiality relates to content, and the processes through which meaning is generated. A synthetic methodology is used. This is based on the key methods and beliefs that can be found in numismatic study, in particular connoisseurship, iconography, and - in more contemporary and especially in university study - ideas of agency. This research presents a synthetic analysis of the most canonical expression of these ideas, by Berenson ([1902]1920), Panofsky ([1939]1955), and Gell (1998) respectively. These are set within a broader intellectual framework through analysis of theories of language (Peirce 1960, Saussure 2006), theories of perception (Böhme 2017, Benjamin [1936]2008a), and contemporary writing on meaning and surfaces (Ingold 2017, Bruno 2014). In this way, the art medal is both the principal object of study, but it also provides the lens through which new understanding is approached, this lens being set within a broader epistemological framework to establish the generalizability of the research findings. There are two objects that are studied in depth. The first of these is the Limbourg Brothers' medal of *Constantine the Great.* Using the method and ideas developed in the early stages of the thesis, fresh understanding is developed of the role of this medal in the collection of the Duke of Berry. A significant contribution to numismatic knowledge is developed in the demonstration of the medal's dependency on the iconography of Baldwin II, the last Latin Emperor of Constantinople. As a result of this new finding, it is possible to understand the role of the medal within its broader system of other objects, from which multiple meanings are developed through juxtaposition and material handing. In order to bring the generalizable insights of this research into view, the thesis closes with an analysis of the exemplary

craft practice of David Pye. It is shown that meaning emerges through a system of movement in which the hand's faculty of touch plays a constructive role. In its conclusions, this research develops knowledge in relation to the intelligence of making as an emergent process within technical systems of humans, materials, and tools. This research challenges future study to direct attention towards the constructive and generative role of touch in art and craft practices. These insights will be vital as we develop new digital technologies of making.

Contents

List of Figures

Some figures are repeated in-line as thumbnails for ease of reference. Larger and better quality reproductions are included in the separate volume of plates that accompanies this text. These are listed below.

6 Limbourg Brothers, *Heraclius*, (1402), 98mm diameter, cast bronze, obverse and reverse. British Museum, Inv. 238. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

7 Pisanello, *John VIII Palaeologus*, (c.1438-1442), 103mm diameter, cast bronze, obverse and reverse. British Museum, Inv. G3.NapM.9. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

8 Gold coin of Holy Roman and King of Sicily, Emperor Frederick II, (c.1231), 20mm diameter, struck gold, obverse and reverse. British Museum, Inv. C.2809. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

9 Leon Battista Alberti, *Self-Portrait*, (c.1435), 201mm x 136mm, cast bronze, uniface object. National Gallery of Art, Washington, USA. Samuel H. Kress Collection Inv. 1957.14.125 Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington

10 Matteo de'Pasti, *Leon Battista Alberti*, (c. 1446-1450), 92.5mm diameter, cast bronze, obverse and reverse. British Museum Inv. G3,IP.1. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

11 Pisanello, *Leonello d'Este*, (1444), 68.5mm diameter, cast bronze, obverse and reverse. British Museum Inv. G3,FerrM.27. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

12 Alexandre Charpentier *Masons*, (c.1905), 60mm x 75mm, biface plaquette, struck bronze. Photograph © the author

13 Alexandre Charpentier, *Duval Janvier*, (1902), 53mm x 60mm, struck bronze, obverse. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A.32-1978. © Victoria and Albert Museum

14 Alexandre Charpentier, *Duval Janvier*, (1902), 53mm x 60mm, struck bronze, reverse. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A.32-1978. © Victoria and Albert Museum

15 Alexandre Charpentier, *Muller Stoneware Manufactory*, (1897), 914mm x 645mm, glazed stoneware, uniface plaque. Metropolitan Museum, New York. 1989.8. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum

16 Classical intaglio showing *Athena Parthenos holding Victory with a wreath, spear and shield* carved sardonyx, 16mm high. British Museum, Inv. 1925,1017.3. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

17 Alexandre Charpentier, *Muller Stoneware Manufactory*, (1897), 98mm x 65mm, cast bronze, uniface plaquette. Metropolitan Museum, New York. 03.7.26. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum

18 Alexandre Charpentier, *Sculpture*, (c.1897), 78mm x 145mm, cast bronze, uniface plaquette. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. 328-1901. © Victoria and Albert Museum

19 Alexandre Charpentier, *Painting*, (c.1897), 82mm x 151mm, cast bronze, uniface plaquette. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. 327-1901. © Victoria and Albert Museum

20 Alexandre Charpentier, *Door Furniture*, (c.1900), 79mm x 46mm, cast and gilded brass. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. 329-1901. © Victoria and Albert Museum

21 Alexandre Charpentier, *Mother nursing her baby*, (1899), 81mm x 52mm, struck bronze, obverse, biface plaquette (reverse shows a young woman in profile). Victoria and Albert Museum, London. 840-1900. © Victoria and Albert Museum

22 Cathie Pilkington, *Jumping Jack*, (2011), 69mm x 50mm, struck bronze and ribbon. Photo © Stephen Dodd, image used with kind permission of The British Art Medal Society

23 Cathie Pilkington, *Jumping Jack*, (2011), 69mm x 50mm, struck and painted bronze and ribbon. Photo © Stephen Dodd, image used with kind permission of The British Art Medal Society

24 Cathie Pilkington, *Majolica*, (2007), 730 x 400 x 320 mm, ceramic, gloss and oil paint. Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art

25 Cathie Pilkington, *Jumping Jack*, (2011), spinning, struck bronze and ribbon, 69 x 50mm. Photo © Stephen Dodd, image used with kind permission of The British Art Medal Society

26 John Jaques & Son, *Happy Families*, (1910). Originally published in 1851 from drawings by Sir John Tenniel. Photograph © World of Playing Cards, image used with kind permission

27 Cathie Pilkington, *Amulet (1)*, (2011), obverse, plaster and oil paint, 100mm x 70mm. © Cathie Pilkington, image used with kind permission

28 Felicity Powell, *Sleight of Hand*, (2011), screen-grab from single channel video installation

29 Felicity Powell, *Sleight of Hand*, (2011), single channel video installation

30 Felicity Powell, *Bees*, (2009), wax on slate mirror back, 200mm diameter

31 Anna Morandi, *Self-Portrait*, (1750-1755), wax and mixed media. Musei di Palazzo Poggi, University of Bologna. Image used under CC BY-SA 3.0 license

32 Anna Morandi, *Sensitive Hands*, (1755), wax and mixed media. Musei di Palazzo Poggi, University of Bologna. Image used under CC BY-SA 3.0 license

33 An advert for the "Lovett" Motor Mascot, image in the public realm

34 Edward Lovett, *The "Lovett Motor Mascot"*, (1912), aluminium, 160 x 120 x 20mm. Image courtesy Southwark Council Cuming Museum Collection

35 Three First World War charms from the Edward Lovett collection. Photograph: Science Museum London via Wellcome Images. Used under a Creative Commons license, CC BY 4.0

36 Felicity Powell, *John Charles Robinson Medal*, (2002), obverse and reverse, cast bronze, 115mm diameter. Photograph © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

37 Chloe Shaw, *This Living Hand*, (2011), obverse, cast bronze and thermochromatic paint, 48mm diameter. Shown here in its cool state. © Chloe Shaw, image used with kind permission

38 Chloe Shaw, *This Living Hand*, (2011), edge, cast bronze and thermochromatic paint, 48mm diameter. Shown here in its cool state. © Chloe Shaw, image used with kind permission of the artist

39 Chloe Shaw, *This Living Hand*, (2011), cast bronze and thermochromatic paint, 48mm diameter. Shown here, left, in its cool state, and right, same face, in its warm state. © Chloe Shaw, image used with kind permission

40 Nicholas Hilliard, *Elizabeth I*, (1589), chased gold, 44mm diameter. British Museum, London, Inv. M.6903. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

41 Johann Baptist von Spix, *Cephalogenesis, Table 1*, (1815), lithograph. Image in the public realm and out of copyright. Source: Archiv der Zoologischen Staatssammlung München

49 Etching of a *Seal of Baldwin II,* from Morand (1790:plate attached following 68). The gold seal was formerly attached to a document dated 1247 both now destroyed

50 Medal depicting *Constantine the Great* (1402), 88mm diameter, silver repoussé, obverse and reverse, detail. British Museum Inv. M.269 © Trustees of the British Museum

51 City of Corby, 1228, *Seal of Corby*, France, cast of AN D5761, collection of Notre Dame University, America

52 *Virgin and Child*, (c.1415), Franco-Flemish copy, bronze plaquette, in the Staatliche Museeun zu Berlin, from Scher (2000:19, Fig. 1.8)

53 Seal of Jean de Berry, Seal of the Duke (1397), France, from Gandilhon (1933:Pl.XIV/4)

54 Seal of Jean de Berry, Count of Mâcon, (1367), France, from Gandilhon (1933:Pl.XIII/2)

55 *Medallion of Justinian*, (527-565 CE), obverse and reverse, modern electrotype copy after gold original, c.85mm diameter, Byzantine, in British Museum. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

56 Gold solidus of Constantine the Great, minted in Trier, Germany, (326-327 CE), British Museum Inv. 1864,1128.188. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

57 Anon., *Saint George and the Youth of Mytilene*, (c. 1250), Middle East, possibly Palestine/Israel, in British Museum, London. Inv. BM1984,0601.1. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

58 Limbourg Brothers, *The Meeting of the Magi* in *Très Riches Heures*, (1411-1416), f. 51v, French, in the Musée Condé, France. Photograph: commons.wikimedia.org, original in public domain. Used under a Creative Commons license, CC BY

59 Limbourg Brothers, *Ara Coeli*, (1411-1416), detail, in *Très Riches Heures*, f.22r, French, in the Musée Condé, France. Photograph: commons.wikimedia.org, original in public domain. Used under a Creative Commons license, CC BY

60 Limbourg Brothers, *Ara Coeli*, (1405-1408/9), in *Belles Heures*, f. 26v, French, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Photograph: commons.wikimedia.org, original in public domain. Used under a Creative Commons license, CC BY

61 David Pye, *Dish,* (1980), 420mm long, Brazilian rosewood. Crafts Council, W43. Photograph: Nick Moss, courtesy of the Crafts Council

62 David Pye, *The Nature of Design*, (1972 edition). Cover showing Benjamin Vulliamy's *Regulator Clock* (c.1780), collection Science Museum, London

63 David Pye, *Fluting Engine*, (1949-1950), shown here in its 1980's iteration, from Pye (1986:47)

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1. Introduction to the Thesis

1.0 Introduction

This thesis is about what happens when we see an art object and understand a quality from it that is real, but not actually present.

Imagine a photograph of a child. The parent sees a real quality of the child through the concrete material image, and recognises that 'this is my daughter'. Take another example, a cultural high-point like an Abstract Expressionist painting. Under the viewer's gaze a great 'whack' of red and mauve paint seems to hold emotion and thought inside it (Didi-Huberman 2005:17). In each case intangible or immaterial qualities are perceived. This is a general property of art objects. The photo hosts the girl; the painting hosts the subjectivity of its artist. These properties are real, but they are not actually present on the material surface: they are real, but not actual.

The terms used in the paragraph above derive from Marcel Proust's definition of the past, of dreams and memories as being 'real without being actual, ideal without being abstract' (Proust in Shields 2003:2); this has been adopted as a definition for the 'virtual' (ibid.). We can think of the photograph and the painting as virtual surfaces. They are material and they are immaterial; indeed, the point is that they have to be both of these things at the same time in order to qualify as art. To put this in a different way, there is no such thing as an 'empty' artwork, an artwork that contains no information, or a picture that contains no image.

This research examines the relation of material and content in artworks, a task that is made harder by the pervasive assumption that one or another term in the relation should be taken as being more important. Historically, most writing about art has been concerned with symbolic content or with artists' biographies. These address issues that are adjacent to the materiality of culture, issues of meaning, whether the meaning is denoted, philosophical or personal. By contrast, most writing about craft has been concerned with histories of

technique and use. These address issues of materiality and function, but at the expense of content that might exceed these limitations.

My experience of this split between the cultures of art and craft is why I became interested in the question, and it is why it matters. My motivation is personal: I studied Fine Art and practiced as a sculptor. As a student this split was evident in the institutional distinction between craft programmes and art programmes. As a practicing sculptor, I felt inhibited and unfulfilled by the frameworks that were available to me as an 'artist'. Through a series of accidents, described below, I became interested in a particular kind of sculpture that sits across this historical distinction, the 'art medal'. This form provided me with an object for thinking about the relationship of material and content, and then for rethinking the common ground between craft and art.

Medal by Pisanello depicting *John VIII Palaeologus*, c.1438-1442

An art medal is a small, two-sided metal sculpture, shaped like a coin, but with no monetary function. The art form is most closely associated with the early Italian Renaissance. Its great progenitor is the Pisan painter Antonio di Puccio, known as Pisanello (c.1394-1455). He is credited with inventing the art form with his portrait of the Byzantine emperor, *John VIII Palaeologus* (sometime between 1438-1442, **figure 7** and above, henceforth *Palaeologus*).

Pisanello's status as the inventor of the medal is purported rather than factual: this thesis considers a number of objects, but in particular an art medal that was made about forty years earlier, no later than 1402, in northern France. Like Pisanello's 'invention', it also depicts an emperor associated with Constantinople, but a much earlier one: *Constantine the Great* (**figure 5** and below, henceforth *Constantine*). They have other features in common. Like most art medals, they feature text and images, and they employ a mimetic figurative language together with a deliberately abstruse, literary and symbolic abstraction. In this way, the medal takes a visual language that reaches into the world, in order to imitate, copy and make physical, and draws this mimetic language together with a symbolic language that withdraws from the world.

Art medals are materially bounded objects, heavy tactile things, but, like photographs, they are full of the content of identity. This thesis concentrates on the *Constantine* for two reasons: firstly, its marginal but early position places it well for rethinking the field; as Pisanello's 'first' medal is dependent on it, consideration of this object is particularly useful for discovering new insights into early medals in general; secondly, it demonstrates a remarkable efficiency of movement between content and material, and so it is a perfect subject to develop the larger ideas that this thesis explores.

People still make art medals today though not in very great numbers. There are well-managed organisations to foster interest in the art form and to maintain its standards. The British Art Medal Society (BAMS) is active in this country, but also publishes, through its trust, the world's leading numismatic journal, *The Medal* – (numismatics is the study of coins and medals). This journal is distributed though the international society *Fédération Internationale de la Medaille d'Art* (FIDEM), which operates across six continents. Many museums purchase medals in a systematic manner, both old and new. So, although medal making is a mature, historically important and stable form of practice, it is also a somewhat narrow and specialist pursuit engaging only small populations of artists and collectors in each country.

Most contemporary medallists occupy a liminal position between the worlds of art and craft. This research began with the thought that I could use the art

medal as an interesting zone of practice from which cross-border raids could be made, in an attempt to rehearse new authorial identities for making. This work was useful, but – ultimately – limited. Over time, the research turned to more fundamental consideration of how art functions, how it is materially meaningful, but it retained its focus on the art medal as its principal object of analysis. It is through thinking about the art medal that the question of content and material is approached.

Art medals present a rich, historical and ambiguous field for study, but one that is limited in form and underdeveloped in theory. For this reason, this research is contextualised and developed with reference to other forms of practice. The concluding chapter presents an analysis of the surface of a wooden bowl by the British craftsperson, furniture designer and theorist David Pye (1914-1993). This develops the speculative findings of the work on the early medal and puts them within a more tangible and immediately valent context for use in practice now. In this way, the research comes from practice and it returns to practice, but its fresh insights are developed through thinking about the historically distant and culturally strange object of a late Gothic medal. This is the value of historical research: it is hard to rethink the present when you are in it; it is easier to have fresh thoughts in unfamiliar terrain.

Along the way there are some discoveries that are significant contributions to numismatic knowledge, but the principal context within which I hope this research will be useful is in a broad conception of contemporary artistic practice. This research draws the materials and techniques of practice out of their supplemental and subaltern relation to denoted, symbolic and philosophical meaning, and presents fresh insight into the relationship between material and content in which these two terms are understood as mutually imbricated aspects of experience.

This chapter is an introduction, not to the art medal, but to my interest in it, and to the context that shaped my experience and understanding as a sculptor. It serves to introduce many of the principal themes that are explored in this research: the relationship between art and craft; between an artwork and an author's mind; between meaning and material; and my attempt to develop a

more adequate understanding of these terms, one that moves beyond binary or hierarchical opposition. It is a personal introduction. It makes what follows easier to understand. It helps to explain why these questions matter. And more particularly, it places these questions within the contingency of my own experience (to paraphrase Braidotti 1994:237). As is typical of much research in the arts, the relationship of the researcher to the object of study is germane to understanding and critiquing that research. This is, perhaps, particularly true of artists.

To summarise: this thesis is about what happens when we see an art object and understand a quality from it that is real, but not actual. This thesis asks how we can understand the relation between material and content in artwork. The question is asked in order to rethink the present conditions of art and craft. The art medal sits across these two cultures and thus is a useful area in which to think differently. The main contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes is to demonstrate the mutual immanence of material and content in artistic practice in which neither term is prior.

1.1 Brain Activity

> Skill without imagination is craftsmanship and gives us many useful objects such as wickerwork picnic baskets. Imagination without skill gives us modern art.
> (Stoppard 1973:21)

> I think a lot of people are afraid of making art – people are afraid of drawing... Because, usually because, they feel they don't have the requisite craft skills… but obviously, that's never held me back.
> (Shrigley 2013:online)

The British artist David Shrigley was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 2013, for his exhibition at the Hayward Gallery of the previous year. This was called: *Brain Activity*. The phrase is used in the context of diagnosis of death. 'Persistent vegetative state' is a condition in which life is maintained by medical intervention, but where it remains ambiguous whether the brain is vital within its unresponsive body. The diagnostic process for brain activity is called

'electroencephalography'. This non-invasive method detects the electrical signals typical of higher brain function. One of the exhibits in Shrigley's show was a taxidermied Jack Russell terrier, performing the clever-dog trick of standing on its hind legs. This apparently animate dog holds a placard in its paws. 'I'M DEAD', this reads, in crude block capitals (**figure 1**). This is a pertinent joke about the promise that art makes: that we are able to diagnose intellectual life from an otherwise unresponsive material thing. There is no electroencephalography for art.

Life Model is the installation that Shrigley made for the Turner Prize itself (**figure 2**). To the layperson, dextrous skill is a symptom of artistic competence, a palpable sign of higher brain function. Shrigley's installation satirises the role of skill in contemporary art. It features an over-life-size sculpture of a grotesquely proportioned male life model, distorted according to the maladroit efforts of an artistic neophyte. The model's eyes blink like those of an oversized doll being tilted back and forth by a toddler. His penis protrudes like a badly stuffed sausage, at intervals dribbling urine into a tin bucket. He is surrounded by a collection of drawings produced by visitors to the show, all of them apparently awful, an inevitability given the unorthodox proportions of their sitter. Everybody fails.

Like a lot of Shrigley's work, *Life Model* is intentionally funny. It is a skilfully pitched display of 'slacker' anti-academism, a sarcastic celebration of contemporary artistic activity. The apparently puerile detail of the model's episodic incontinence is a significant contextual reference. To an art-going public it calls to mind one of the earliest and most famous de-skilled artworks in the canon, Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), a porcelain urinal, displayed on its side as a sculpture, and signed in black in a somewhat painterly manner, 'R. Mutt'. *Life Model* makes a mockery of issues of skill and competence in artistic practice. It has neither technical facility, nor any grand conceptual thought. It is a self-critical, self-abnegating artwork for our age: incompetent and incontinent.

Shrigley encountered life drawing in his first year of study, as a Foundation student at Leicester Polytechnic. A Foundation is a yearlong introduction to art and design. The polytechnic is now De Montfort University, and it is where I

work. Mimetic figuration requires objective skills of looking and recording; but of his undergraduate degree at Glasgow School of Art, he comments (2014:online):

> I had a great time making a rope swing in my studio, and I loved the freedom to produce whatever I wanted… I teach there now – I'm like a Freudian psychotherapist with my students.

Whereas brain surgery is a practical material skill, Freudian psychotherapy is purely discursive. In imitation of Walter Benjamin, it could be said that artist is to psychotherapist what craftsperson is to brain surgeon: the artist maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, whereas the craftsperson penetrates deeply into its tissue (see Benjamin 2008a:35): the difference between 'doing' and 'talking things through' is a crucial distinction between the cultures of craft and art. This is the cultural condition of art and craft *in general*; it is not claimed that this divide is true in every instance. The difference between art and craft is of a general nature, and relates to the prevailing and characterising *ideas* of both of these spheres of practice rather than to their essential nature; though, of course, this construction itself repeats the problem that this thesis is directed at resolving, namely how we understand the inherence of culture in material things.

1.2 Art Education: Art or Craft?

My particular context, the background from which I am approaching this project, is as a sculptor. I went to art school in the 1990s. Like Shrigley, and most other artists of my generation, my education began with a Foundation year in Art and Design. A Foundation is intended to be a diagnostic experience, aiding the student in discovering where their strengths lie, before they commit themselves to a three-year undergraduate career. My dilemma was whether to study sculpture or ceramics. My most helpful tutor was the Royal Scottish Academician and lime-wood carver James Castle. He argued that sculpture was 'more philosophical', and he convinced me that this would suit me better than what he called 'pottery'. Castle, who is now in his seventies, is a close friend. I recently asked him about his tutorial advice to me at that time. He described

himself as having been ‘deliberately provocative’, but he recognised the conversation (Castle 2018).

Following Castle’s advice, I went to visit Chelsea College in London, to assess if it was where I wanted to continue my education. This visit to Manresa Road was thrilling. There was a gallery just to the left of the front door, and open to the main corridor. A tall man wearing a dress and made up like Rachael from the Ridley Scott film *Blade Runner* (1982) was talking about gender, probably as part of a performance piece; to my adolescent mind, this was an environment in which anything was possible. I also knew that Henry Moore formerly taught at Chelsea, and I had walked past his sculpture on the forecourt just outside the gallery, *Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 1* (1958, **figure 3**). The celebrated sculptor Richard Deacon was listed in the prospectus as a visiting tutor; and the person showing me around said that it was a highly selective art school, and that most applicants were not accepted. All of these factors persuaded me to apply, and in due course I was invited back for an admissions interview with a portfolio of my work. This contained a large number of life drawings, which were shunted to one side. ‘We are not interested in those here’ I was told; nevertheless, I was accepted, and I enrolled onto the undergraduate Sculpture programme, from which I graduated in 1997.

The sculpture tuition that I received at Chelsea College was primarily discursive, as Castle had promised it would be. There was no technical tuition or practical instruction of any kind. The education that students received was through critiques in the gallery and tutorials in the studio; a team of technicians ran workshops that we had access to, but they did not teach in any formal sense. As a cohort of students, we learnt to talk about art, and it was by talking about art that we learnt to become artists. Fortunately for me, I already had some ability with modelling, casting and drawing, having received exceptional instruction at school and on Foundation. From what I now recognise as an unusually solid technical base, what I lacked as an undergraduate student I was able to invent for myself, or acquire through the black-market of peer learning. In retrospect this was a productive experience, but by the time I reached the end of my course, nevertheless I felt inadequately prepared on a technical level

to work as an artist; for this reason I chose to go to the Royal College of Art to do a Master's degree, because I knew that there I would be able to learn how to work with bronze. I felt I needed a craft, a palpable skill, with which to work.

In comparison to Chelsea, the Royal College was quite a conservative environment. Professor Glynn Williams led the department, a sculptor whose neo-figurative stone carving is in the tradition of Eric Gill and Henry Moore. Williams' most effective champion was the conservative critic Peter Fuller, erstwhile editor of the influential journal *Modern Painters*. About a decade before I enrolled at Chelsea, Fuller had written a review for the magazine *Art Monthly* of a large exhibition of sculpture that occupied London's South Bank and the Serpentine Gallery, called *The Sculpture Show*. At the time, the show was the largest exhibition of work by living sculptors that had been held in the UK. It featured the work of Richard Deacon, whose presence at Chelsea College had attracted me to study there. Most memorably, David Mach constructed a large Polaris submarine from old tyres, which was exhibited outside the Royal Festival Hall. This sculpture was set ablaze by a thwarted furniture designer with neo-classical tastes called James Gore-Graham, who accidently killed himself in the arson attack. It is no exaggeration to say that Fuller also hated the exhibition. In print, he burnt it to the ground ([1983]1985:163):

> Now it is one thing (though not in my view a particularly admirable one) for an artist to take a leak over an academy by presenting it with a urinal inscribed with the words R. Mutt; but it is quite another when an academy itself – with the extravagant backing of the Arts Council, the GLC [Greater London Council], a large corporation and a Foundation run by our most distinguished sculptor [Henry Moore] – should start pissing all over the public. If it does so what possible response can it expect other than indignation and resentment at the waste of aesthetic, financial and institutional resources?

Fuller contrasted this 'Arts Council onanism' with a show at a commercial gallery in London that contained 'a small sculpture by Glynn Williams, called *Walking*, which though only a few inches high, was worth more than all the Hayward and Serpentine rubble art put together.' The review concludes with a clarion call (167):

> The sculptural tradition in this country needs to be revived, so that work of real stature can readily emerge again. But for this to happen the system of training sculptors, and of patronage of sculpture, needs to be reconstituted in a way which actively prefers work rooted in mastery of particular skills and traditions of sculpture, acknowledging the limited, but vital, aesthetic possibilities this art form affords.

Fuller's critique of the show as a whole, and of individual works in particular, is neither fair nor balanced; and looking back at the show now, 35 year later, it seems that Fuller's call to arms has gone unanswered. Throughout the late '80s and '90s, the field of sculptural practice expanded to the point that it lost its centre of gravity. Most of the sculpture courses in the UK have been subsumed, together with the other named disciplines of painting and printmaking, under the generic title: 'Fine Art'. What sits within that frame is a very loose constellation of practices, ranging from the material to the immaterial, whose unifying principal is a habit of self-critique and a prioritisation of discourse (Rowles 2011:12-13,58,103-104,108). Institutions such as the City and Guilds of London Art School – an art school in which craft values are still actively taught in a fine art context – are a rare exception to this trend towards generalism (113-121).

In the 1990s, when I was a student, what was meant by the term 'sculpture' was still a matter of active debate. The Sculpture department at Chelsea was only about a mile from the Sculpture department of the Royal College of Art (henceforth RCA). Glynn Williams' inaugural professorial lecture entitled *On Kicking Out the Cuckoo* had been delivered at the RCA in 1991, but when I enrolled at Chelsea College three years later, the text of this lecture was still circulating among the undergraduate student body. It was the object of outraged ridicule. Shortly after my arrival, a final year student handed me a photocopy of Williams' typewritten text. I don't think I read it at the time. An expression of reflexive disdain was sufficient. But the very fact that the text of this lecture was circulating in a neighbouring academic institution, three years after its delivery, even as an object of opprobrium, is a substantial, if backhanded, compliment.

A paginated copy is preserved in the Royal College of Art's library (Williams 1991). In this lecture, Williams laments the expansion of sculpture's fold to include a host of 'parasitic nomads' (2), practices and processes that are not related to the core of what he sees as its native formal language. Williams appears to adopt a teleological model of artistic progress in apparent and somewhat surprising debt to the Formalist art historians Heinrich Wölfflin and Aloïs Riegl, a sense of sculptural language beginning with the ancient Egyptians and evolving through successive eras. On closer reading this adoption of an idea of progress comes to appear strategic: the post-modern model of cultural 'free-play' anticipated by authors such as Francis Fukuyama and Arthur Danto is the true object of his ire; their ahistorical relativism is countered by the sense of evolution that Williams tries to invoke. The symptoms of this relativism are threefold: firstly, the importation into sculpture of forms of practice that do not fit with other disciplines (1); secondly, a practice of appropriation (7); and finally, as a corollary of the previous two, the prioritisation of discourse (13):

> Context is now its [sculpture's] prime ingredient and contextual relevance can be explained clearly in words. The conceptualising of sculpture played into the hands of the articulate philosophising intellect… Worse than this the philosophic intellect, using articulate words becomes the authority on the art…

His prescription is that sculptors must return to the core of their discipline (13):

> If you want to send a philosopher like Arthur Danto cringing into the corner – pull out your formal aesthetics. It's like garlic to a vampire.

Williams is a conservative sculptor. This lecture is a command issued against a rising tide, and it is notable as a minority report on the future of sculpture, the vision for a path that has not been taken.

In a contemporary context, however, the lecture remains interesting for what Williams has to say about craft, and the manner in which he distinguishes it from art. This is especially curious, given the nature of Williams' own work, which is so clearly crafted, and so reliant on material skill. There are two

possible reasons why he may have felt it necessary to police this line. The first is that his own work would have looked to his detractors, the stackers of tyres and plastic buckets, a lot like craft. To a sculptor, that observation is not received as praise. The second motivation can be inferred from the text of the lecture itself. Having been at pains to divide the firmament of contemporary practice into that which properly belongs to sculpture and that which belongs to philosophy, it becomes necessary to pre-empt the accusation that his approach is too orientated around processes, and therefore too finite, too limited, to qualify as art (12):

> Philosophy to a great extent, deals with perceptions of reality. So does Art and particularly so does Sculpture. The urinal in the art gallery was not so much a sculpture as a philosophic statement about sculpture. It's an old and well travelled path and the emperor's new clothes only work for those believing the concept. When art is alive and evolving, the heart that pumps it is its Theory. Art without theory is but Craft or Therapy. In this very fact lies all the trouble.

The boldest move in Williams' lecture is to associate conceptual art with mere fashion. Towards the conclusion, he seems to address his students directly. His audience is exhorted to 'Put taste aside, which hangs on the fashions of a moment, and trust your knowledge' (15). The operative word here is 'taste'. It suggests a lack of rigour, the habituated and unconsidered response to visual things. But this raises a question, and one for which Williams provides no answer: how is it, exactly, that theoretically actuated art *looks* different from craft? How is it that brain activity is diagnosed from a dumb material thing?

1.3 Art Medals: not Art, not Craft

The relationship of mind to material is central to this thesis. As will become apparent, my view is that the two cannot be disentangled. But at the time that this research began, its focus was on the apparently simpler task of critiquing the view that Williams expresses: that art must have ideas, and that without ideas, it is just craft. This is exactly the sort of pomposity that Shrigley lampoons. The motivation for undertaking this work is inferable from the

account of my own education: it felt like I was offered a choice between working in an intellectual or a material culture. There are signs that this is changing. Craft practice is finding space in contemporary art venues, the recent show of Anni Albers' textiles at Tate Modern (2018) being one such example. A few contemporary sculptors who employ craft processes, for instance Caroline Achaintre and Rachael Kneebone, enjoy considerable critical and commercial success. Craft can be a provocative idea.

Against this evidence, however, we could consider the different career trajectories of two artists who work in clay, Grayson Perry and Richard Slee. Perry uses craft as an interesting position from which to comment on gender and taste. Slee's work comments on many of the same issues, but its success as 'art' is occluded by the technical brilliance with which it is made. Because Perry's ceramic work is less well made, his work is easier to assimilate into fine art discourse. Nevertheless, Perry - who frequently dresses as a woman and calls himself, in this guise, Claire - described his own struggle with acceptance in these terms (Perry in Frayling 2011:11):

> I think the art world had more trouble coming to terms with me being a potter than with my choice of frocks… If you call your pot "art" you are being pretentious. If you call your shark "art" you are being philosophical!

In a fine art context, it seems as though craft is vital as a provocative idea of making, but that it cannot do what it is really good at, which is to make things well. The original conception of this project was to use the art medal as a site of practice that belonged neither to art nor craft, as a way of rethinking the relationship of technical ability and ideation. My idea was that it might be an interesting place in which different and new artistic identities could be rehearsed. A later chapter presents several works by contemporary artists who have done exactly that.

One of these artists is Cathie Pilkington. Her experience of art education is indicative of the way in which the art medal sits across the antagonistic fold between the two cultures. Pilkington is a very successful artist. In 2015 she became Professor of Sculpture at the Royal Academy in London; twenty-one

years previously, Williams interviewed her for a place on the Sculpture course at the RCA, an experience that she remembers clearly. Pilkington's journey to the Sculpture department at the RCA was not straightforward. Her first choice of undergraduate degree was Sculpture, which she studied at Edinburgh College of Art. As a student on this course, she was encouraged to work with heavy-gauge metal, but received inadequate instruction in how to work this material and she struggled to manipulate it. Her frustration was compounded by the critical approach that was taken to the resultant work: as is typical for a fine art subject, the discourse was 'not really about the material'. For these reasons, after a brief period, she chose to transfer to the Jewellery and Silversmithing course, where there was a teacher who, as she says, 'actually taught me how to do things' (Pilkington 2012:unpaginated).

The show that she mounted at the conclusion of her Jewellery and Silversmithing degree was unusual. Rather than being a presentation of a small collection of wearable forms in precious metal, Pilkington made a three-meter long brooch in the shape of Noah's Ark. She applied to the Royal College of Art, and was accepted onto the Goldsmithing, Silversmithing, Metalwork and Jewellery course (GSMJ) to study electrotype processes under Professor David Watkins. Once there, however, the narrow focus on one process felt too prescriptive. A critical point in Pilkington's transition from a craft department back to sculpture came when she met the sculptor and medallist Ron Dutton, who had visited the RCA to talk to Masters students about art medals.

Dutton is a one of the most significant figures in British numismatics. In 1982, along with Mark Jones, at the time Keeper of Coins and Medals at the British Museum, and Graham Pollard, an eminent numismatist and Deputy Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Dutton was one of the founding members of the British Art Medal Society (henceforth BAMS). The society set out to promote the understanding and production of art medals (see M. Jones 2017:5-7 for an account of this period). Dutton's particular task on this visit was to foster participation in a competition that BAMS was holding in conjunction with the Royal Mint. Unlike her tutors at the RCA, Dutton addressed Pilkington's work as sculpture; this brought her frustration to a head; following Dutton's

visit, she decided to transfer departments. However, when she attended an internal interview, Williams rejected her work as 'too aesthetic, too thematic, and not large enough' (Pilkington 2012:unpaginated). Pilkington was required to put together an entirely new portfolio over the course of a year out from study, which she did, and was – eventually – accepted. Williams' judgement, 'too aesthetic, too thematic, and not large enough', is expressed in practiced academic shorthand. But what, exactly, does 'too aesthetic' mean? It seems to me that this objection hinges largely on matters of taste, despite his suspicion of this faculty.

Taste is a property that belongs to the artist rather than to the work that they make. As the painter and academic Howard Singerman puts it (1999:22): 'Artists are an ontological rather than an epistemological problem; theirs is a question of being, rather than of knowing.' Singerman's broader point, expressed in his book length critique of art school education, is that art tuition in these institutions is directed to the acquisition of personal qualities and behaviours rather than the instruction of technical ability, in other words, art school teaching shapes the artist's personality, their mind, rather than their aptitude with material. Singerman's observations are consistent with my undergraduate experience at Chelsea. The learning was largely discursive, and tacit, more like Shrigley's psychoanalytical approach than anything too messy or physical.

This view, that art is somehow *inside* the artist, whereas craft, as a technical ability is somehow *exterior*, is a remarkably persistent opinion. It is surprising that artists who might be expected to think otherwise, artists who have a relationship with craft practice, also express these views. We can see this view in Williams' lecture, and in Castle's tutorial advice; but for an historical overview we can take the following three quotations, all statements made by sculptors, spanning a period of approximately one hundred years:

> I say Art cannot be taught. Art education is therefore impossible. The art school is no good to anyone except as a springboard for revolutionists. Learning about art, reading about it, museums and exhibitions all alike, are of no value to the workman. They

> are the occupation and invention of well-meaning theorists and dealers. Technical institutes are a different matter.
> Eric Gill ([1918]2009:62)

> …I don't want to put too much stress on the actual act of carving, or on the craftsmanship involved. Craftsmanship in sculpture is just common sense – anyone can learn it. It's certainly easier than painting, I'd say. The mental grasp is difficult, and the three-dimensional conception, but the workmanship, which people like Eric Gill thought so important, can degenerate into a most awful mental laziness, like knitting or polishing the silver.
> Henry Moore ([1961]1992:137)

> …Craft and tradition are very firmly linked and that must not be denied. That is one of the great things about it, and craft, by definition, is something that can be taught to someone else, you know, you can teach someone how to throw a pot and they will become as good at it as you if they've got the necessary. Whereas art is very much linked to the individual and their vision and it's not necessarily something that can be taught or passed down.
> Grayson Perry (2012:online)

All of these sculptors actually *make* things. But each one of them articulates an *assumed* distinction between the teachable and the un-teachable, the exterior and the interior, between craft and art. If we follow the assumption that artistic ability is an interior property, connected with personal vision and the mind, and that craft is an interstitial ability of dextrous skill, a teachable facility that sits between people and their materials, then we can associate these two cultures with different parts of the body: art is a brain activity; craft belongs to the hands.

In its small but persistent way, the art medal sits across this false division. The reasons for this are, in part, historical. The art medal emerged with early Humanism. It was born into an age before the crafts were separated from the arts (Jones 1986:15). It relies on techniques that are more associated with craft – or even manufacturing – than they are with art; and yet it has a long history of being practiced by painters and sculptors, like Pisanello, who are claimed by art history for the academy.

Those are historical considerations, but the format of the medal also works against this divide. The art medal employs words and images, and mimetic representation and abstraction, to achieve its full effects. In this way, it appeals to the literary mind at the same time as to the sensuous and mimetic apprehension of natural likeness. Most importantly, it is an art form that is designed to be held in the hand in order to be seen. An art medal is both a visual and a palpably physical object. For these reasons, it appeals to both senses of engagement: it is simultaneously interior and exterior, mental and physical.

A few years later than Pilkington, my first encounter with the medal was as a student at the Royal College of Art, when I was encouraged to enter the same Royal Mint competition. My effort was a medal commemorating the centenary of Henry Moore's birth, a derivative form with a hole in it, which I did not cast. A decade later, in January 2008, I was appointed Senior Lecturer in Sculpture at the University of Wolverhampton, and here I encountered BAMS again. The departments of Sculpture, Painting and Printmaking had been merged into the more general subject area of Fine Art; in the first year of my appointment I was asked to organise an exhibition of medals made by the retired Head of Sculpture, the same Ron Dutton, most of whose creative output is limited to medallic production, and who had recently received an honorary fellowship from the University. I did not welcome the task, but I became interested once I started to handle the objects that had been made by Dutton and others of his peers. By the time the show opened, in October of that year, I had formed a distinct interest in these strangely liminal objects. I arranged for a BAMS council meeting to be held on the University premises, and joined the society. A few months later, I was elected to their council as Artist Secretary, where I was responsible for commissioning new medallic works. I was convinced that the medal offered an interesting environment from which to think about a number of issues that had long concerned me, in particular, the relationship between thinking and making, imagination and skill. I wanted to test the idea that the art medal might provide an interesting space for artists to develop an authorial

identity that did not prioritise faculties of mind over those of the hand. That is how this work began.

1.4 The Thesis

This chapter has introduced the context for this research, and has given an account of my introduction to the art medal. In order that the thesis can be easily followed over the next six chapters, this section provides a statement of the research question, and an account of how this was developed. The chapter concludes with a précis of the argument as it unfolds.

1.4.1 The Research Question

The overarching research question to which this thesis provides an answer is this: how is meaning generated through the relationship of content and material in the art medal?

As the preceding section describes, the question was motivated by my experience of fine art practice. Specifically, I wanted to test what I intuited to be the importance of the 'material' in material work. I had an untested belief that a simple activity such as modelling with wax or working metal is generative of meaning in a way that is not reliant on denoted signification. Meaning in the visual arts is conventionally assumed to arise from figuration, allusion, or symbolism, or to be generated through display, discourse, curation or use. And, of course, meaning does arise through these routes. But what I am describing here is an intuition, born from my experience of sculpture, that making – as one particular relation of material and content – is also *in itself* constructive of meaning. It was through my research into the art medal that I understood that this intuition was accurate, and – more importantly – not just that this is true, but also *how* it is true.

1.4.2 The Research Process

This account of the overarching question might suggest that I had more knowledge at the beginning of the process than I really did, that I knew from the

outset that this was the question that I was asking, and that I had a premonition of the arc that the research would follow. But this was not the case. In fact, the question had to be developed.

As I describe above, this research became a defined 'project' when I encountered art medals for the second time, as an academic at the University of Wolverhampton. At that point I was interested in craft, its histories, and processes, and – perhaps more significantly, *ideas* of its histories and practices. In other words, I was interested in craft identity, and what this might offer me, as someone who had been educated in a fine art context. My motivation for this interest was a feeling of dissatisfaction at the lack of attention being paid to the materials of sculpture and the material knowledge of sculptors, and the primary importance that I felt these had for the art form. I perceived from my vantage outside the field that things were different in craft practices and discourse.

I had started to express an interest in craft through my own practice. In the years immediately prior to this project, I was constructing objects from forged steel that were made like wicker baskets, and cast bronze sculptures that borrowed from the surfaces of planished copper vessels and worked leather. I became increasingly interested in other artists whose work was constructed along similar lines, using processes that were 'borrowed' from the traditional crafts, sculptors like the celebrated American artist Martin Puryear.

So when I encountered the art medal again, what intrigued me was that it felt like a neutral zone, something in between fine art and craft. I felt that the art medal might provide a space for artists to explore authorial identities not normally associated with fine art. The first iteration of this research was directed at exploring this opportunity. This led to my interest in the artists that I discuss in chapter three: Cathie Pilkington (b.1968), Felicity Powell (1961-2015) and Chloe Shaw (b.1983). All of these artists deal with the hand and with ideas of the hand. In particular, Pilkington has deliberately used ideas of craft in exactly the manner that interested me at that time. Many of her pieces quote other artists' and craftspeoples' work, or play with ideas of making and the different kinds of status that are associated with different processes.

The initial stage of this research satisfied my starting assumption that the medal can used as a site for authorial exploration. But it provoked other and more fundamental questions. I have had a deep engagement with Cathie Pilkington's work over quite a number of years. Although I recognised that it presented an interestingly evasive idea of who she was as an artist, and I understood the reasons why this strategy would be appealing, the creative evasion that characterised her production at that time came to feel less promising as a longer-term position for an artist to adopt.[1] What started to feel more productive was the fascinating materiality of Felicity Powell's work, as well as the materiality of earlier medals like the *Constantine*, and – in particular – a gold medal by Nicholas Hilliard (c.1547-1619) of *Elizabeth I*. These objects took me back to the root of my long-standing fascination with making, to my intuition that material engagement is generative. These processes do not need to be named as belonging either to 'craft' or 'fine art' in order to work. In fact, this oppositional naming is an obstacle to understanding.

In other words, although I had shown that the art medal is a useful place for trying out authorial identities not normally associated with fine art, I had also come to realise that this question was not, ultimately, going to satisfy my desire to understand how material practice is meaningful, and in fact, that it might get in the way. In looking at ideas of craft, and craft identities, I was looking at the wrong thing. I had to shift my attention from the art medal as a site for rehearsing new identities, as though these can be tried on like a set of clothes, to looking at why, exactly, the art medal offered such a constructive example in the first place, and why it did not seem to belong to any particular prescribed identity. This is what prompted the formulation of the overarching research question: how is meaning generated through the relationship of content and material in the art medal?

[1] Pilkington's work has continued to develop. Her recent work deals with ideas of representation and presence in a much more direct way, indicating a more invested and settled authorial position.

1.4.3 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is about what happens when we see an art object – in this case, an art medal – and understand from it something that is real, but not actual. It asks how we can understand the relation of material and content in artistic practice.

This first chapter gives the principal themes. The starting proposition is that art objects give access to qualities that arise from the object but that are not actually part of them. These qualities are real. Domestic photography is an example of this process at work: we can see an image of a person whom we love, and feel that the image really has the quality of that person. We feel this even though common sense dictates that the object in question is a limited material thing. Though they exploit different technologies, a portrait medal functions in the same way: a bounded material object gives a real sense of the person it depicts. The portrait medal and the photograph are material things. In each case, their content is the person (and the ideas associated with the person) that they depict. In the case of contemporary practice, the content is similar – the intellect of the artist. All of this content is somehow 'inside' the artwork, or palpable from or through its surface.

This thesis deals with structurally similar relations of content and matter. A sense of involution is implicit in the phrase 'material culture': every made thing is a folding together of material and content; but whereas fine art values content, craft practice celebrates material. For this reason artists are considered to be an ontological problem whereas craftsmen are considered to be an epistemological problem. In the specific context of my personal experience, these two cultures fall across the material cultural fold in two contrasting directions. The aim of the thesis is to understand *how* material and content are folded together, and in gaining this understanding it is hoped that new avenues of expression will be opened up for practice.

The principal object of analysis is the art medal, which sits across the cultures of art and craft. Chapter two introduces the art form and describes its history. The *Constantine*, the French medal made some time around 1402, is described. This medal influenced Pisanello's later work, and it is this that

stimulates a period of intense production in Italy in the mid to late 15th century. The general properties of the humanist art medal are given: on one face there is a morally idealised portrait. This gives the physical appearance and the moral 'air' of the sitter; here there is already a movement from morphology to virtue. The obverse presents a coded and literary representation, a more interior language. This is how the medal 'folds' content and material.

Chapter two also reviews the dominant cultures of interpretation. There are two schools: an older 'numismatic' approach that is fostered by curators and collectors and that is as old as the art medal itself – this serves to maintain collections; and a newer 'academic' approach that treats the medal as a source of evidence in support of more open study. Numismatics relies on methods of iconography and connoisseurship, and more recently, scientific materiality. The physical completeness and self-containedness of the medal is important to its capacity to depict the inner qualities of the person. Connoisseurial method relies on a similar perception of artistic quality. This instinct is described by numismatists as being 'naturally endowed', an inward trait of the practiced viewer. In this way, the numismatist and their object of study are mirrors of each other. The academic school, by contrast, is dominated by a sensuously detached method, and in particular by ideas of agency.

Chapter three returns to the context within which I hope this research will be useful: contemporary practice. It presents an impersonal counterpoint to the context presented at the start of the thesis. It describes the relationship between discourse and making, art and craft, and in particular the figure of the artist and the craftsman, and how ideas of these figures have been exploited. There are several case studies given. The medals of Alexandre Charpentier (1856-1909) show that by the start of the twentieth century, the image of the artist and the craftsman were available for quotation, and that they were associated with different ideas of potential: ideal and unbounded in the case of the artist; real and skilled in the case of the craftsman.

The medal sits between received ideas of the skilled hand and the artistic brain. The original purpose of this research was to use the medal as a site for developing new identities for sculptural practice. This project can be seen in

Cathie Pilkington's work. In the work of Felicity Powell and Chloe Shaw the hand is explored as a site for negotiating self and other and as an index of personal and authorial identity. In these three contemporary cases, the hand has two values, as a site of making and a site of meaning. Ultimately these two values cannot be disentangled.

If the contemporary work tests the argument for ideas of craft as an 'escape-hatch' (Adamson 2007:69), a way for artists to think differently, the final case-study presented in chapter three shows the limitations of this approach. In Nicholas Hilliard's medal of *Elizabeth I* (1589), it is most evident that making and meaning cannot be separated. This object demonstrates extraordinary technical competence. This is the driver for its iconographic message: supreme regal power. The strength of the monarch is conveyed by the apparent magic of the medal's facture. The conclusion of this chapter is that to concentrate on ideas of craft and art is to miss the point, because it places emphasis on what these terms mean as abstract ideas, and this is already a retreat from practice. In this conception, craft will always be fine art's inferior other, and only one side of the fold is valued.

Chapter four presents the theoretical and methodological work by which the relation of material and content can be approached at a more fundamental level. This work begins by defining meaning and interpretation. It suggests that there is a necessary movement implicit in any attempt to analyse an object for what it 'really' is. We can see this idea of movement in the very act of looking at an artwork, because we cannot dig into a medal or a photograph, and find the real person nested inside the object. What we find is a quality of that person. This quality is real, but not actual.

Using the ideas and beliefs inherent in numismatic study as its guide, this chapter takes key statements associated with each of the respective methods identified in chapter two and critiques these in order to develop a synthetic methodology by which the question of material and content can be approached. The conclusion of this chapter is that 'quality' arises from the index of art both as an abstraction and a form of contact. Rather than defining 'meaning' as a fixed and stable entity, whether that is causal materiality or

denoted symbolism, the chapter posits meaning as movement along an axis, from inner judgement to exterior transformation, from representation to action. To perceive quality is to weave a surface of meaning between thought and material. There is no meaning without movement in both directions. Thought and material are mutually immanent.

In developing this methodology, the art medal acted both as object and guide. Had I set out to understand the relation of content and material in contemporary sculpture, I would have had a vast and competitive array of theoretical approaches to draw from. However, in my early researches into the medal, I found that there was a defined school of numismatic study, and that this drew on a small number of implicitly stated methods. Through careful reading of numismatic literature, I was able to infer the ideas and beliefs that underpinned these methods, and then – (because numismatic method is only rarely explicitly stated) – to identify clear expressions of these ideas and methods from other authors whose work was closely proximal to the field of study. In this way, the art medal provided its own tools for analysis.

The synthetic methodology is necessary because numismatic study relies on approaches drawn from iconography and from connoisseurship, and these are not philosophically consistent with each other. Without the work of chapter four, I would not be sure that the conclusions of this research are robust, and that they do not simply present a mirror of the object of analysis. That is why it was necessary to develop a philosophical position in relation to the nature of human perception and experience. This is the work that concludes chapter four.

Chapter five presses the analytical tools developed in chapter four into use. It presents a significant contribution to numismatic knowledge in showing that the *Constantine* is dependent on the iconography of Baldwin II, last Latin Emperor of Constantinople. This discovery required a great deal of archive work, as well as the interrogation of several image databases, among them the iconographic library of the Warburg Institute, London. An account of this work is presented in the Appendix.

The broader conclusion of chapter five is dependent on the discovery of the medal's inheritance of the iconography of Baldwin II. This connection clarifies

the medal's role in its original context: meaning emerges in the art medal through being handled alongside other objects in a collection. The materiality of the medal, its particular sense of interiority, is profoundly active in generating content. My analysis demonstrates that the art medal combines two directions of engagement with the world, a sensuous and mimetic visual language, and a more conceptual and literary abstraction. Medals are tactile, and – often – heavy things. They have a palpable and interior body, and it is this sense of inwardness that gives weight and import to the diffuse content that these objects draw together and give presence to. In this way, the medal as a material object cannot be considered separately from the medal as a source of signification; neither can the medal be fully understood except as part of a broader system of other material objects.

In the case of the *Constantine*, the medal folds together an image of Baldwin II with a number of other references. These have different temporalities associated with them, ranging from the time of personal biography, historical time and the time of Christian eschatology. The conclusion of this chapter is that the *Constantine* is a material device for prospection: by pairing the medal with other objects the beholder could use it to construct from among a range of potential meanings. In this way the object is exemplary of the axis of movement from interior judgement to exterior transformation. The connection with the iconography of Baldwin II is supportive of an emergent view in numismatics that the early medal, and in particular Pisanello's adoption of the form, is associated with the cause of Eastern Christianity and crusade. In the context of our question, the relation of material and content in artistic practice, the *Constantine* is instructive as a material surface that gives access to qualities from which content is actively constructed, in a manner of active play. In other words, as its collector uses the medal, turning it over and moving it around, pairing it with objects within a larger system of objects, it is continually made and remade. It is the materiality of the medal that draws these qualities together and makes them present.

The work of chapter five explores the question of content and material in an historical and necessarily speculative way; the final chapter of the thesis returns

to a more contemporary and tangible context. As this roadmap to the thesis explains, the project came from the demands of my own practice. It was motivated by my experience of the culture of fine art, in which I had been educated and in which I work, and my view – which was an intuition at the start of the project – that a simple activity of making can be, in itself, constructive of meaning. That is what started this research, though it was only through the art medal that I was able to approach an answer. In chapter six, I consider the practice and working methods of the British woodcarver and furniture designer David Pye, in order to set the lessons that I have drawn from the art medal in a more available and contemporary context for other makers. This penultimate chapter demonstrates exactly how the mental and the material are mutually dependent, interpenetrative and expressive. The chapter applies the findings developed from my work with art medals to another case, and shows these findings to be useful and instructive in this context as well. The chapter presents a concrete instance in which making is negotiated though materially situated systems of cognition, and this shows how we can understand a material object in relation to its makers' intent as this is distributed through their tools and materials.

The conclusion of this chapter, and of the thesis as a whole, is that there is a structural similarity between the practice of human identity in daily life, the nature of perception and human experience, and the practice of making. All of these are necessarily involuted and materially situated activities in which movement on an axis between judgement and transformation, similarity and difference is a necessary condition of experience. In this way, this research draws the materials and techniques of practice out of their supplemental relation to intellectual or denoted meaning. Its main contribution to knowledge is to recognise material and content as imbricated aspects of experience.

This research will be useful for art and craft practioners in directing attention to what happens when we work with materials, and why this is important. In this way, the research has moved from an approach that sought to play with the differences between art and craft to focus on what fine art and craft share, as material practices. Ultimately, the continually redrawn divide

between art and craft is not productive, and to focus on this split is to focus attention at the least interesting aspect of both zones of practice. It is more provocative to look in a granular manner at what happens when we make things, at the way in which material work is meaningful. That is exactly what this research offers. By presenting this new understanding of the relationship between material and content in the art medal, I have been able to move beyond the rather tired divide between the zones of practice of art and craft, and to focus attention on what really matters in each case: the way in which making and the experience of made things is both mental and material.

2. Art Medals

2.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the history of the early medal, its influences and its successive evolution into a portrait medium that combines a mimetic and symbolic visual language. In particular, it describes one of the most significant medals in the numismatic canon, the medal of *Constantine the Great*, probably made by the Limbourg brothers in France in 1402.

This object has an ambiguous status in relation to subsequent medals, being regarded as a chief begetter of the art form, having a catalytic influence on Pisanello's work; but it is also regarded as belonging to a fundamentally different period of history, a mediaeval rather than a Renaissance object. This curious legacy is the product of a tendency towards categorisation in numismatics, which seeks hard boundaries. As we will see, numismatic study is dominated by an intersubjective method, in which connoisseurs of medals read them as vehicles of other identities, either the author's or the sitter's. This method is a mirror of the medal as a portrait medium: the quality of personality that is read in medals has its equivalence in the quality of the numismatist who is able to apprehend this reading. By contrast, academic literature prioritises other forms of evidence, is less bounded, and adopts an anaesthetised, aesthetically numb approach. For this reason it gives more sense of how a medal functions, but it does so at the expense of understanding the medal as a material object.

This chapter is important to the thesis as it develops in two ways. Firstly, by introducing the art medal, it prepares the way for the analysis of contemporary medals in chapter three, and in particular the way in which these objects deal with ideas of art, craft and making. Secondly, by identifying the beliefs that underpin numismatic study, this chapter is important in preparing the ground for the methodological work of chapter four, and in identifying the three key analytical methods that form the basis of the synthetic methodology of this research.

2.1 What is a Medal?

A typical art medal is a small twin-faced metal sculpture like a large and somewhat thick coin with slightly higher relief than would be usual for such an object. It is normally issued in multiple casts or as a struck edition. Although commemorative coins have an ancient past, the history of the modern medal begins in the early fifteenth century. The art medal is distinguished from coins by being a personal artefact. Most art medals bear a portrait on one face, and the art form is frequently used as a vehicle for personal propaganda; in this case, they are often referred to as 'portrait medals'. A medal has no monetary function and is not necessarily the product of a state or government. Medals can also be compared to metal seals such as the chrysobulls used to authenticate Byzantine and Holy Roman decrees (**figure 4**), but it is distinguished from these by being independent of any document, and without any legal value – (chryso-bull meaning gold-seal, henceforth 'bulls'; strictly a chrysobull is a gold seal attached to a decree issued by an emperor or a monarch). The art medal is also quite different from military or state honours, again by virtue of its independence from bureaucratic structures and the mechanisms of government. Like any attempt at categorisation there are many exceptions to these rules; but for the purposes of maintaining collections in museums, size, shape and material are the most significant qualities.

2.1.1 The Medal of *Constantine the Great*

This research addresses questions of material and content. It develops understanding of interpretation and the values that are inherent to it. One of the main objects of analysis is a small silver repoussé medal in the British Museum (Inv. M.269). It is about 88 millimetres in diameter. The obverse shows a mounted emperor riding to the right, Constantine the Great, founder of Constantinople. Henceforth this object is referred to as *Constantine* (**figure 5**).

Constantine's horse has a high-stepping somewhat prancing gait. The rider is wearing an imperial *pallium* (a kind of tabard) and a loose cloak, the ends of which are gathered up in his right hand; he holds the horse's reins very lightly in his left; these are gathered through a loop that sits on the horse's thorax. The

rider's crown pierces the band reserved for the legend. Starting immediately to the right of this, the inscription reads: '+CONSTANTINVS · IN · XPO · DEO · FIDELIS · IMPERATOR · ET · MODERATOR · ROMANORVM · SEMPER · AVGVSTVS', (Constantine, faithful in Christ our God, emperor and ruler of the Romans and forever Augustus).

On the reverse two women are shown seated on either side of the Cross and the Tree of Life. One woman appears to be quite young. She is half-naked, and has her foot on a small animal, possibly a weasel, in what might be a

Medal depicting *Constantine the Great*, 1402

trampling gesture. She holds a cord lightly in her right hand, which is attached to a bird perched behind her. This bird might be an eagle. The other woman holds a fruit in her left hand, and she appears to be offering this to the girl. A similar bird is perched behind her, but without a cord. There are many theories regarding the identity of these two women, but these are not immediately germane to this research (e.g. T. Jones 2011:22; Scher 1994:35; M. Jones 1979b:37). An infant can be seen in the centre of the rim of the basin, holding two serpents by the ends of their tails. This figure recalls the infant Hercules. According to mythology, the goddess Hera sent snakes to Hercules, to kill him in his crib, but which he strangled. The snakes this infant holds appear to be spewing water into the basin at the bottom of the Cross. Two more serpents at

the top of the Cross also issue water from their mouths. There is another animal above a small aperture in the base of the basin: perhaps a lion. The base of the Cross can be seen through the opening itself, entwined by another serpent. The inscription around the medal reads: '+ MIHI : ABSIT : GLORIARI :· ·: NISI : IN : CRVCE :· ·: DOMINI : NOSTRI : IHV : XPI:·', (Far be it from me to boast of anything but in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ).

The figures on both sides of the medal are placed in the floating space of an otherwise empty field. The nature of the design and the manner of execution are typical of the International Gothic style of the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century.

We know that *Constantine* – or rather the first version of it – was made no later than 1402: its acquisition, on the 11th November of that year, is described in the inventory of the third son of King Jean II of France, the eminent collector and patron, Jean, Duke of Berry (1340-1416). We also know that the object described in the inventory is not the same version as we now have in the British Museum, because the inventory describes it as a gold pendent, surrounded with gems (Guiffrey 1894:72 #199). There were three inventories taken of the Duke's collection, in 1401, 1413 and 1416. These were published by Jules Guiffrey in two volumes, in 1894 and 1896.

The Duke of Berry's inventories list several related objects, the most important of which is the medal of *Heraclius* (#200 in the inventory), also preserved in the British Museum (Inv. M.238), again in the form of an early copy. Much of this medal's imagery is Cross focussed. The obverse shows *Heraclius* in profile (**figure 6**). The reverse shows the same emperor in a coach, carrying the Cross. The inscription running around the rim of the on the reverse is, in densely abbreviated Greek: '· HPAKΛEOC · EN · XW · TW · ΘW · ΠCTOO · BACI · KAI · AVTO · PW · NIKITHC · KAI · AΘΛOΘETHΣ AEI · AVΓYCTOC ·', (Heraclius, faithful in Christ our God, Emperor and Ruler of the Romans, victorious and triumphant, Augustus forever). There is a version of this medal in the British Museum, but unlike the *Constantine* it is in cast bronze (Inv. M.238). It is about 98 millimetres in diameter. There is a silver repoussé version of the *Heraclius* in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France of very similar size; and this is

much closer in fabric to the *Constantine* (Inv. M.269). Guiffrey's realisation that the surviving images of *Constantine* and *Heraclius* match the descriptions in the Duke's inventories is the most significant contribution that has been made to their study. In this respect, every subsequent study is dependent on Guiffrey's work (1890).

The *Constantine* is a remarkable object. The quality of design and execution is extremely fine. It is a brilliantly charismatic medal. There are some peculiarities about this object also: the rider has a curious hieratic presence, a sense of still grace that is quite unlike the charging knight that features on so many other Northern European seals at this time; his manner of comportment is unusual – (even unique, as we will see) – and the position of his left hand, and the curious arrangement of the horse's reins both seem distinctly odd. This latter detail has been written about at length. As Sir Mark Jones – the leading authority on this medal – has observed, the horse appears to be harnessed 'in such a way that it must be impossible for its rider to control' (1979b:38). This observation forms an element in his attribution of the medal to the Flemish-Burgundian artists the Limbourg brothers, for this peculiarity is repeated in the image of *The Meeting of the Magi* in their illuminated work the *Très Riches Heures* (1411-1416:f. 51v; **figure 58**). In the expanded field of the illustration, a page is shown leading the horse, obviating the need for the rider to be in control; Jones' suggestion is that the image on the medal is truncated. This observation does not make the arrangement any the less strange, because we know of no other images of horses being lead with the same arrangement of reins.

Quite apart from how it might strike the viewer, the *Constantine* is a remarkable object because it occupies a curious position in the history of the art medal, being made about forty years earlier than the medal widely considered to be the 'first' such object, a medal of John VIII Palaeologus by the Italian artist Pisanello. This peculiarity is one of the reasons why it is a propitious object of study: although all of the principal numismatic scholars agree that the *Constantine* is related to the emergence of the art form 'proper' in Humanist Italy, the nature of this relation is little studied and little understood.

2.2 The History of the Early Medal

2.2.1 Pisanello's *Palaeologus*

Despite the evidence of earlier medallic objects such as the *Constantine*, it is generally agreed that the tradition of the portrait medal begins with Pisanello's portrait medal of the Byzantine emperor John VIII Palaeologus (1392 – 1448). This medal was made some time between 1438-1442, about 40 years after the *Constantine*. As will become evident, the word 'tradition' is what really matters here because the context of the objects' interpretation, their interpretative use, is of remarkable significance to understanding the field of study.

There is an excellent example of the *Palaeologus* medal in the British Museum in London, in bronze, c.103 millimetres in diameter (Inv. G3,NapM.9, **figure 7**). The obverse shows a right-facing portrait of John VIII, the penultimate emperor of Byzantium. The apex of his conical crown pierces the legend, which begins from the '+' at the 6 o'clock position on the interior rim of the medal, reading: ' + IѠANNHC · BACIΛEVC · KAI · AVTO · KPATѠP · PѠMAIѠN · O · ΠAΛΛAIOΛOГOC ·', (John Palaeologus Autocrat and Emperor of the Romans).

The reverse shows the emperor hunting in a rocky landscape, a quiver to his right and a bow to his left, paused in an attitude of prayer before a wayside cross, sat astride a stationary and somewhat heavy horse. A page accompanies him, also on horseback, apparently departing to the left. The inscription at the top reads: '· OPVS · PISANI · PICTORIS'; around the lower interior rim of the medal the attribution is repeated in Greek: 'EPГON · TOV · ΠICANOV · ZѠГPAΦON', (work of Pisano the painter. Transcriptions, Scher 1994:45).

In the late 1430s, the Byzantine emperor and his retinue were in Italy, in order to attend the ecumenical Council of Ferrara and Florence (see Vickers 1978:417-424 for a review of this material). The purpose of the council was to mend the schism between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Byzantine participation was motivated by the parlous state of John VIII's empire. Under Ottoman attack, this had shrunk to the city of Constantinople and a few square miles around it. The Byzantine hope was that Western military

assistance would follow religious union, and a new crusade would be launched in defence of the Eastern Christian empire. John was ultimately unsuccessful in securing sufficient military assistance. The Byzantine Empire, which had begun with Constantine's dedication of the city in 330, fell to Mehmed II – Mehmed the Conqueror – in 1453. The last reigning Byzantine emperor, John VIII's son Constantine XI, was killed in the battle.

Pisanello was in Ferrara in 1438, and it is known from existing sketches that he had the opportunity to draw the Byzantine emperor and his retinue from direct observation when they arrived to participate in the ecumenical council. It is not known why the medal was made, nor is it known why the particular and novel form of the medal was adopted. Pisanello was not a sculptor, but 'PICTORIS', a painter. Whatever his motivation, over a roughly decade-long period, Pisanello produced another twenty-six medals. Matteo de'Pasti, Sperandio and numerous other artists immediately followed his success, helping to establish the portrait medal as a popular art form.

2.2.2 Coins

Regardless of Pisanello's motivation, speaking of the profusion of medals that followed his example, the eminent numismatist Sir George Hill describes ancient coinage as the art form's 'chief, if not its only begetter' (Hill 1920:10). It may not be known exactly why the form of the medal was adopted, but Pisanello's work, and the work of his successors develops a nascent interest in classical coin portraits.

In 1231, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II issued some remarkable gold coinage, minted at Messina and Brindisi, in which a Roman portrait occupies the obverse, and a large imperial eagle dominates the opposite field, in imitation of the gold coins of Trajan and Caracalla, and quite unlike the rest of his coinage (**figure 8**). Roughly one hundred years later, Petrarch (1307-1374), one of the earliest collectors of ancient coins, records a meeting with the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV (r.1346-1378) in which Roman coins provide a moral lesson for the emperor, as objects for emulation (Petrarch in Campbell 1843:163-4):

> I seized this opportunity of presenting him with some imperial medals [coins], in gold and in silver. In this collection there was one of Augustus, well preserved; Caesar seemed alive on the coin. I said to his imperial majesty, "Behold the great men whose place you occupy, and who ought to serve you as models. These medals are dear to me; I would not have offered them to another; you alone have a right to them. I know the heroes whom they represent. I know what they achieved. For you it is not necessary that your majesty should understand their history; and yet it is necessary that you should imitate them." I then gave him a short sketch of the lives of those worthies whose images I presented to him, throwing in, from time to time, words calculated to excite him to follow their example. He seemed to listen to me with pleasure, and, graciously accepting the medals, declared that he never had received a more agreeable present.

As interest in antiquity waxed during the early Renaissance, knowledge of the coin portraits of the Caesars was increasingly reflected in the arts of power and government. For instance, in 1390 Franceso II Novello da Carrara had a commemorative coin-like object struck, to celebrate his recapture of Padua. This object is closely imitative of a Roman *sestertius* (an ancient coin), and possibly reflects Petrarch's influence at the Carraran court. Unlike a coin, however, it had no monetary function. When Franceso II's victory was reversed in 1393, the Venetian mint commemorated the event in the same manner, with a struck coin-like medal in which Venice plants her standard on the Carraran wheel. Both of these examples are struck. They are fabricated in the manner of all coins, through the application at great pressure of die matrices to blank discs of metal. By contrast, most medals – but by no means all – are cast.

Although medals have no exchange value as currency, we need only consider the context in which coin-portraits were used for such a conflation to make sense. There is good evidence that some early medals were intended to be buried in the foundations of new buildings, and it seems clear that the Renaissance rulers who commissioned these objects were hoping that they would be discovered in exactly the same way as the coins that so stimulated their interest were being unearthed: they were consciously attempting to project themselves into posterity – at this early stage, what mattered was not their contemporary value so much as their future discovery (M. Jones 1979:8).

Indeed, it is possible that classical coins were so badly misinterpreted in the fourteenth century that they not only served as prototypes for the Renaissance medal, but they were actually taken to *be* medals (Syson 1995:43). This exceptionally close connection is reflected in etymology: the Italians used just one word for both ancient coins and Renaissance medals: *medaglie* (Syson 1995:44), and for a time, the rest of Europe followed their lead (Hill 1920:9). It follows from this that no distinction was made at this early stage between striking and casting as a mode of manufacture, though, as we shall see, these two different modes of fabrication have implications for how the objects were subsequently evaluated.

2.2.3 Leone Battista Alberti

Another influence on Pisanello's *Palaeologus* is likely to have been provided by the earliest labelled self-portrait in the Western tradition, made by Leone Battista Alberti sometime around 1435 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, Inv. 1957.14.125, **figure 9**). This low-relief bronze plaquette immediately recalls a Roman imperial cameo, which themselves are likely to have had some influence on the visual language of the medal. The plaquette features several characteristics that soon become typical of the Renaissance medal, but which are not immediately evident in the *Palaeologus*.

Although Alberti was certainly distinguished, he was not royal, imperial or noble, and as such the self-portrait is a representation of an ordinary citizen. The style of the object, its pose, costume and epigraphy, all appear self-consciously classical. There is a cryptic device underneath the subject's chin. As is clear from its appearance on other objects, this serves as an emblematic identifier for the artist, and can be understood as an *impresa* in embryo, a forebear of the allegorical devices that dominate the reverse of most Renaissance medals – (an *impresa* is a form of visual allegory somewhat like an heraldic symbol albeit more arcane).

Other aspects of the plaquette might be similarly coded. The subject's tufted hair may have been intended to suggest a lion's mane, in punning allusion to Alberti's given name, 'Leone' meaning lion in Italian (NGA 2014:

unpaginated). Although the conventional date for the object is 1434-1436, it is possible that it was made when Alberti was in attendance at the council of Ferrara (Bliss 1994:41). Either way, it is not unreasonable to conjecture that Alberti may have advised either Pisanello or his patrons on the production of the *Palaeologus*: Alberti maintained a professional relationship with Pisanello's successor as a medallist, Matteo de'Pasti, with whom he collaborated on architectural projects (Bliss 1994:41), and Alberti's device of the winged eye can be seen on the reverse of de'Pastis' medal of the architect of 1450-5 (**figure 10**). From the preservation and repetition of this device, although it is impossible to gauge the extent to which Alberti's self-portrait had any bearing on the *Palaeologus* medal itself, it can be assumed that this plaquette exerted some influence on the early evolution of the medal.

2.3 The Visual Language of the Early Medal

The three objects that we have looked at so far, the *Constantine*, *Heraclius*, and *Palaeologus* each have a profile portrait on one side, and on the other, a narrative scene of some sort. The *Heraclius* and *Palaeologus* show their subjects journeying; and the *Constantine* presents the curiously resistant image of the two women. This combination of portrait and instructive biographical or narrative scene is followed in some of Pisanello's other medals. *Filippo Maria Visconti* (c.1441) shows the Duke of Milan on one side, and on the other, the duke on horseback, armed. This is a more militaristic image, but is otherwise quite like the reverse of the *Palaeologus*. But Pisanello's medals of Lionello D'Este are more typical of medallic production as it was to evolve. These pair an idealised image of the sitter on one side, and on the other a distinctly arcane *impresa* (**figure 11**). This is the form followed by de'Pasti and Sperandio. Let us look at the origins of the visual language of the Renaissance medal, beginning with the portrait.

2.3.1 The Morally Idealised Portrait

Petrarch was instrumental in promoting the view that the portrait imagery on coins and gems is mimetically truthful. However, as we have seen from the

account of his homily to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV, this portrait imagery was considered to offer character insights into the moral nature and nobility of the Caesars (see also Mann 1998:16).

This belief follows the example of Roman biography. The Roman historian Suetonius wrote his biography of *The Twelve Caesars* in about 121AD. Anyone familiar with this work, as Petrarch definitely was (Corradini 1998:23), will know that portraits are coloured by value judgements, mingling physical and moral characteristics, so that the former is a mirror of the latter. Thus we read that the majority of the Emperor Nero's actions were 'lustful, extravagant, greedy or cruel' (Suetonius 1960:222); and we find his base character mirrored in his decadent appearance: 'Physical characteristics of Nero: Height: average. Body: pustular and malodorous… Features: pretty, rather than handsome. Eyes: dullish blue. Neck: squat. Belly: protuberant. Legs: spindling' (239). By contrast, the great Emperor Augustus is 'remarkably handsome and of very graceful gait even as an old man… [his] eyes were clear and bright, and he liked to believe that they shone with a sort of divine radiance: it gave him profound pleasure if anyone at whom he glanced keenly dropped his head as though dazzled by looking into the sun.'(94) Augustus is the great man whose virtues Petrarch impressed on Charles IV: a scholar and numismatist could read a description such as this, and use it to inform his reading of a portrait on a Roman coin. It is tempting to infer an identical practice at work in the specific context of the Duke of Berry's collection: it is known from the inventories of his collection that Jean possessed a copy of Suetonius' work (Guiffrey 1894:227 #861), and also that the *Constantine* and *Heraclius* were among a larger collection of medallic images of Roman rulers including Julius Caesar, Tiberius, Augustus, and Philip the Arab (Marcus Julius Philippus) (1894:70-72 #195, #197, #198, and 28-29 #55).

To the modern mind standards of physical accuracy seem hard to reconcile with an impulse towards the morally symbolic, but Petrarch held a subtle conceptual model of mimesis based on familial succession rather than strict duplication. His correspondence shows that he viewed the relationship between a painting and its sitter as ideally similar to that between a father and his son, in

which the most telling traits of personality are emphasised while distracting particularities are ignored: 'Here there is often a great divergence in particular features, and yet a certain suggestion which makes the likeness –what our painters call an 'air' –most noticeable about the face and eyes' (Petrarch in Mann 1998:15). Slavish attention to detail was not the aim. What mattered was truthful extraction of the revealing physical trait that would take the viewer to the sitter's will, hence their moral quality. Petrarch's views predate Pisanello's work by about fifty years, but the art historian Elena Corradini describes a similar model at work in medallic portraits of Pisanello's period, including works by him, through which (Corradini 1998:24):

> …the members of ruling families and the artists and *letterati* who frequented their courts could leave a permanent reminder of their existence. By disseminating their true features, the supposedly private might become public. The very word *vultus* (face) was interpreted by humanists as referring to the soul and the will of individuals, indicated by its root, the Latin verb *volo*, "I want".

A similar emphasis on the physical and its association with character is covered by the Italian term *virtù* (sometimes spelled *vertù*), frequently applied to medals and other portraits. This short word covers a portmanteau of meanings, but the best equivalent in English is probably 'nobility', conveying an idea of potential to act, intrinsic life force, aesthetic rightness, and laudability of character. This combination of qualities can still be read in Pisanello's medals, and would have been even more legible to a contemporary audience. Unlike most of the early medals, many of which were struck and very small, Pisanello's medal of John VIII was larger and more finely modelled. This afforded greater scope for the artist to demonstrate his own *virtù* as a sculptor, but also provided a larger canvas on which the personal and moral character of his sitters could be explored.

Another crucial point of difference between work pre-and post-Pisanello is the sophistication of the reverses. Rather than bearing simple armorial devices, reminiscent of heraldic imagery, his medals either feature instructive biographical scenes or, more frequently, densely symbolic imagery which

provides an allegory of the sitter's character. These *imprese* speak about the sitter in a more-or-less coded form. The interpretation of *imprese* was intended to be further augmented both by written legends on the medals themselves, but also by parallel biographies similar to those provided for the Caesars by Suetonius (Corradini 1998:33).

2.3.2 *Imprese*

Although Pisanello's work shows a marked increase in the sophistication and opacity of its signs (see **figure 11**), this aspect of the Renaissance medal also has some antiquity. *Imprese* are often understood as deriving, like the medal itself, from Renaissance readings of antique sources, in particular literature such as Horapollo's *Hieroglyphika*, a confused compendium of Egyptian hieroglyphs and their meanings discovered in 1419, or Aeschylus' play *The Seven against Thebes* in which a herald describes the devices on warriors' shields. However, although this is conceded as a stimulus, in his study of early *imprese* the historian John Goodall (1993) suggests that it is more accurate to think of these as an evolution of medieval devices. He points out that 'although many collections of medieval seals have been published they seldom include the non-armorial personal seals' (153), and indeed many were never systematically recorded. But where records do exist, such as in the Public Record Office in London, personal seals dating back beyond the fourteenth century show striking parallels with the much more studied Italian *imprese*.

Tournament devices are another source for *imprese*. Called *emprises*, these are just as etymologically linked as graphically familiar, tokens of martial prowess, especially reflecting undertakings of a chivalrous or adventurous nature (OED 1993:810 and OED 2017:online). Although they are personal images, they can also carry a political message: Goodall gives the amusing example of 'the bitter quarrel between the dukes of Burgundy and Orleans at the beginning of the fifteenth century [which] led to the former adopting the device of the plane, to smooth away the Orleans' cudgel, and this was incorporated into his jewels and robes' (153). These non-armorial devices inveigle themselves into the fabric of clothing, impress themselves on jewels,

decorate books, and creep over seemingly any object which an owner wished to have personally branded (154 -155).

Although some early *imprese* are hard to fathom, later Renaissance *imprese* are positively arcane, such as those employed by Pisanello on his medals of Leonello D'Este. They are designed to symbolise the sitter's *virtù*, but also to require *virtù* of the reader, a test of class: an *impresa* 'should not be so obscure as to require a Sibyl to interpret it, nor so plain that all the vulgar crowd can understand it… it should [also] have a motto, if possible in a foreign language, so as to disguise the meaning somewhat more, but not so much as to make it doubtful', or put simply: 'the device should not be understanded of the people' (Hill 1920:12-13). Thus, while the obverse might assert the public face of a ruler, the reverse enabled a more exclusive form of communication, drawing a charmed circle around the *cognoscenti*.

While the values and sense of textual density expressed in an *impresa* are subtly different from the values expressed in an heraldic seal, both sets of devices function as personalised means of identification. In the case of the *impresa* we can see that this identification is individual rather than genealogical; but what is really interesting about the *impresa* is how it acts as a counterpoint to the portrait in a way that mirrors the mutual dependency of mimesis and symbolism that can be seen within the Renaissance portrait itself. Just as the portrait combines the outwardly visible with the moral, so too the medal combines a public face with an allegorical and inwardly directed obverse. The two sides of the medal are complementary, but distinct. The portrait face is an idealised representation of the physical person; the allegorical face draws together references as clues to that person's virtues and achievements.

It is useful, at the conclusion of this section on the history and form of the early medal, to emphasise a couple of points. We have seen that the form of mimesis that dominates the obverse, the portrait face, is intended to have a moral aspect and to communicate the sitter's 'air'. In this way, the portrait is a movement from likeness and similarity to qualities of personality and virtue. This direction is taken further by the symbolic reverse. The second point is that the early medal is associated with ancient coins. A coin is a material object that

acts as a token of exchange. Here, therefore, we can see the same movement, from material to an abstract quality of value.

2.4 The Ambiguous Status of the *Constantine*

In addition to the example of coins, cameos, and Alberti's plaquette, there is a further specific precedent for Pisanello's 'invention' of the medal: the French medals of the Duke of Berry, and in particular the *Constantine*.

The Duke's inventories list a number of medallic objects, but only two survive in a complete form, *Constantine* and *Heraclius*. These, as can be adduced from the inventory descriptions, are second-generation copies: the finest examples are made from silver repoussé and are unadorned whereas the originals were made from gold, and were encrusted with gems. These objects were made no later than 1402 at least forty years before the *Palaeologus*. They are mentioned by all of the main authors (*inter alia* T. Jones 2011:17-49; Scher 2000:4 ; Lavin 1993:68; M. Jones 1979a:9-11; Hill 1978:36; Weiss 1966:14), and are widely believed to have had a direct influence on Pisanello's production of the *Palaeologus* medal.

There are a number of material similarities that make this view highly suggestive. At c.100 millimetres diameter, the size of the *Palaeologus* medal is similar to the Berry medals. Like the *Heraclius* medal, the obverse features a right facing portrait. In both pieces, the subject's headgear pierces the border formed by the surrounding text. Like the *Constantine* medal, the reverse shows an equestrian figure facing to the right. All three objects depict Byzantine emperors, all of whom are associated with the Cross.

Of course, the most striking correspondence between these objects is the context of their production. Both the Berry and the *Palaeologus* medals were made during a Byzantine emperor's visit to Europe. The Berry medals were made during the visit of Manuel II Palaeologus to Paris, where he stayed from 1400-1402 as a guest of the French King, the Duke of Berry's nephew. Pisanello's medal was made on the occasion of the visit of Manuel II's son, John VIII Palaeologus, to the ecumenical council of 1438 in Ferrara, to which Niccolò d'Este acted as host. Furthermore, as Pisanello had worked for the Este from

the late 1430s, it is extremely likely that he was aware of the copies of *Heraclius* in Niccolò d'Este's collection, and although copies of *Constantine* are not similarly inventoried, it is likely that he was familiar with this object as well (T. Jones 2011:87; Weiss 1966:14).

The epigraphic evidence is equally suggestive. Each medal carries an inscription that honours the Emperors depicted, in translation: Constantine, faithful in Christ our God, emperor and ruler of the Romans and forever Augustus; Heraclius, faithful in Christ our God, Emperor and Ruler of the Romans, victorious and triumphant, Augustus forever; John Palaeologus Autocrat and Emperor of the Romans. None of these are styled in the normal Western form of a Roman emperor at any time, either classical or medieval; but they do mirror the Greek formulae used by the Byzantine imperial chancery during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. From this it can be surmised that there was reasonable contact between the Byzantine retinue and the makers of these medals, both in the case of Manuel II's visit to France, and his son's visit to Italy (Weiss 1963:140).

A rather more speculative point of comparison between the Berry medal and Pisanello's medal can be found in the possibility that the depictions of Constantine, and more probably Heraclius, are portraits of Manuel II (M. Jones 1979a:11 for Constantine; Barker 1969:401,531-532 for Heraclius). This would make the Berry medals portraits of the father and the *Palaeologus* a portrait of the son. This identification is not without its problems, especially with regards the *Constantine*, but is supported by the Berry medals' departure from previous depictions of Heraclius and Constantine, and some similarity to Manuel II as his image has been handed down through other sources (Weiss 1963:40). Thus the strong coincidences of appearance, the application of near identical epigraphic formulae, the similar circumstances of production, the presence in Ferrara of a copy of the *Heraclius* medal, and the possibility that Pisanello may have recognised this object as a portrait of a living emperor, all make it highly likely that the first cast medal was directly inspired by this older, French source.

While there is no controversy concerning the precedent of coins or of Alberti's plaquette, the implications of the connection to the Berry medals for

the portrait medal's subsequent development are subject to two divergent attitudes, and have never been adequately explored.

As will become clear below, numismatists tend to concentrate on those aspects of the medal that construct it as a defined corpus in the tradition of Pisanello. Thus, despite being responsible for one of the most important and perceptive studies on the Berry medallions, Mark Jones describes them in his *Catalogue of French Medals in the British Museum* as a 'false dawn… great but isolated examples of the late medieval goldsmith's art', and ascribes them to a period of medallic production which is 'little more than a reflection of alien cultural influence translated into concrete form by the application of skills developed for quite other purposes' (1982:8). Although his comments are directed at a specifically French context, the language that he employs suggests an underlying bias; in terms that border on the pejorative, he objects to the open and synthetic nature of this period of medallic art. Likewise, in what remains the best introduction to the field of study, *The Art of the Medal*, the same author acknowledges the influence of the Berry medals on Pisanello's *Palaeologus*, but has nothing to say about how this French influence might impinge on the message of the Italian objects that follow (1979a:12).

By contrast, Irving Lavin's short but important essay *Pisanello and the Invention of the Renaissance Medal* (1993) draws attention to the coincidental circumstances of Byzantine diplomacy that unite both examples, and seeks to read the medals in that light. Tanja Jones follows Lavin's lead: her recent doctoral thesis is built on the premise that Pisanello's adoption of the medal was not just inspired by the example of the Berry medallions and their Byzantine associations, but rather can be wholly explained by them, understanding of the latter requiring knowledge of the former (2011).

Whether Pisanello saw the medals of the Duke and had these in mind when the *Palaeologus* was made is not really the matter at hand. There is enough similarity between these two sets of objects to assume that there is a connection of some kind between them – most likely a direct connection. One of the specific findings of this research, presented in chapter 5, is the dependency of the *Constantine* on the seal imagery of Baldwin II, last Latin

Emperor of Constantinople. This is new knowledge, but it does support the emergent view of Lavin and T. Jones that Pisanello's adoption of the medal is specifically related to the cause of Eastern Christianity, and is associated with crusade.

It will be noted that approaches represented by M. Jones on the one hand, and T. Jones on the other construe the origins of the medal in divergent terms. Both authors see the French objects as important; but where one is anxious to assert the limits of the field and to define, the other seeks interpretation through a more open and relative approach, with less heed to categorical boundaries. This is more than a difference of opinion. It is a difference in the nature of their study. It is to this that we now turn.

2.5 How the Medal is Studied: a Literature Review

As Barry Cook, a curator at the British Museum puts it (Cook 2011:v):

> …it has been the museum curator and the amateur scholar between them, harmoniously utilising both private and museum collections, who have promoted the development and study of numismatics – the investigation of medals, coins and related monetary objects. University-based academics have played a relatively lesser part, though far from insignificant. As a result the major museum collections and the curators who maintain them have tended to have a disproportionate impact on the subject and this shows little sign of changing.

In fact there is some overlap between these two professional groups, collection-orientated numismatists on the one hand and university academics on the other, not least because several significant collections of coins and medals are housed within universities. Examples of these are the holdings of the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford University), Dumbarton Oaks (Harvard University) and the Hunterian Collection (University of Glasgow). However, it does make sense to deal with these two groups in turn. For the sake of brevity, literature associated with collectors, curators and the maintenance of collections, the first of Cook's two groups, will be called 'numismatic'.

Numismatic literature has a long and continuous history, and it remains by far the most prolific. To a great extent it is concerned with issues of

categorisation and the maintenance of the collection, though as will be seen the question of where to set the limits of a collection involves a subtle act of interpretation. The second category of literature, that which is produced by university academics, is much smaller. In this literature the medal is encountered as a case study, for what it might reveal about the Renaissance portrait, for instance, or ideas of power in fifteenth century Italy. Here, rather than being the main object of scrutiny, the medal serves as evidence in support of a larger thesis.

The numismatic literature will be dealt with first. Its most significant author, especially to a reader of English, is Sir George Hill (1867-1948), formerly Keeper of Coins and Medals at the British Museum, subsequently Director of the same institution. Hill's legacy is extensive. His work pulls together that of earlier continental scholars, Alfred Armand, Aloiss Heiss, Julius Friedlander, Georg Habich, and Cornelius von Fabriczy, and expresses their findings in a systematic and available form. The British Museum houses the national collection of medals, a large number of which were acquired by Hill. His *Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance before Cellini* (1930) remains the standard reference for the fifteenth century, and his *Medals of the Renaissance* ([1920]1978) is still the best introduction to the subject. Graham Pollard revised both works when Keeper of Coins and Medals at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, in 1984 and 1978 respectively, though the changes are not substantial. Hill has been described as 'both the best and worst thing to happen to the study of Renaissance medals' (Flaten 2004:1005): best on account of his extensive scholarship and organisation; worst because his forceful judgements occasionally express opinion rather than fact. Study of sixteenth century medals has suffered on his account. This has been rectified by one of his successors as Keeper at the British Museum, Philip Attwood, whose *Italian Medals c1530-1600 in British Public Collections* (2003) effectively picks up where Hill leaves off.

Although the two cannot be entirely separated, cataloguing is a narrower pursuit than interpretation. Henrik von Achen, a specialist in sacred medals at the University Museum of Bergen describes the 'operational necessity' of clear limits. His interest is in 'small, predominantly two-dimensional, sculpture,

produced as a medal, usually with a text element as part of the design and in more than one copy' (von Achen 2008:69). In order to engage his interest, an object not only has to look like a medal, it needs to have been made intentionally *as* a medal. His taxonomy is severe, but not untypical. Such definitions are usefully chronological as well as formal. The classic museological view is that Pisanello made the 'first' medal some time between 1438 and 1442 (Scher 1994:15; M. Jones 1979a:11; Hill 1978:10 and 1930:6; Weiss 1966:9). The object depicts the penultimate Byzantine emperor, John VIII Palaeologus (**figure 7**). It marks the 'the real beginning of the medallic art of the Renaissance' (Hill 1930:6), the 'springing off' point described above.

Museum numismatists produce catalogues, establishing, so far as they are able, the facts of authorship, age, location and iconography. But as we have seen, the attribution of 'first' medal is not strictly factual, for while the *Palaeologus* is extraordinary, its claim to primogeniture is based on judgements concerning interpretation rather than physical identity. The same authors who choose to 'start' with Pisanello catalogue many earlier twin-sided, portrait-bearing objects made from metal. Hill's *Corpus* begins with the mural medals (intended to be interred in the walls or foundations of a building) of Francesco I Da Carrara (1930:3). These predate Pisanello's work by at least eight years. Being limited to Italian objects, Hill does not catalogue the even earlier French examples listed by other authors, such as the *Constantine* that is the subject of this research, or indeed, the medallions of late Rome and early Byzantium (M. Jones 1979a:7-11). Clearly, the medallic tradition cannot be defined in strictly material terms. The election of the *Palaeologus* medal as point of origin reveals a shared set of criteria that marks this object out as qualitatively different – better, perhaps – than other earlier objects. These principles sit before the scholarship, but they are rarely explicitly stated. They are clearest in the medal's most judgemental author, Hill, but they have left their mark on the whole discipline.

The first distinction Hill draws is between coins and medals. Whereas coins are controlled products of a government, private citizens can issue medals without restraint. Therefore, a medal is a 'personal document' (Hill 1978:15).

The second distinction is that twin-sided portrait-bearing objects made prior to Pisanello's medal are generally smaller and struck, produced from dies in the manner of a coin. By contrast, Pisanello's portrait of the Byzantine emperor is considerably larger and is made from cast metal. The method of production is highly significant for the object's critical legacy.

The reason for this is that landmark interpreters of medals accord cast work an elevated status relative to struck objects. Hill considers casting to preserve an expressive and intimate connection to the artist's hand. By contrast striking requires greater force in the production of its dies, and thus it tends towards a hard over-definition of form (1912:15). This value is echoed in Roberto Weiss' classic study of Pisanello's *Palaeologus* medal (1966:9-10); and is preserved in Stephen Scher's scholarship, which recently described the 'desiccation of style', 'inherent' to the mechanical craft of striking (2014:unpaginated). Moreover, prominently signed 'OPVS PISANI PICTORIS', work of the painter Pisanello, his work is by a recognised artist rather than a craftsman.

There is a degree of nineteenth century prejudice to many of Hill's judgements. He damns modern medallists for their use of the reduction machine. 'Nemesis follows quickly on their laziness', he writes, 'for neither modelling nor design can be truly translated on to a smaller scale except by an intelligent hand' (1912:18). Even intelligent hands can fail: condemning the products of an entire nation, he praises the German medal for its 'high ideal of craftsmanship', but bemoans that it possesses 'knowledge but not culture' (1978:116). This is an incredibly loaded statement: if knowledge is equated with craftsmanship, then it is clear that Hill conceives of culture as a supra-material quality. As we will see in the next chapter, these beliefs were shared and strategically exploited by Hill's near contemporary the French sculptor and medal-maker Alexandre-Louise-Marie Charpentier.

There is a degree of bluster about some of Hill's expression, but his strident tone conceals subtle judgements. In addition to an Edwardian horror of the industrial, his antipathy to struck work stems from knowledge of process, and his observation of its effects. Many artists used punches to create dies – (indeed, this is precisely the process employed by the sixteenth century sculptor

and goldsmith Benvenuto Cellini). In this process, different punches would be fashioned corresponding to separate parts of the design. Once the die was made malleable through heat, the artist would then punch the design into the die in stages. Following this process, as Hill puts it dryly, 'you must be a very great artist if your design does not go all to pieces' (31). This thought reveals an assumption, not unreasonable, that 'completeness' is a positive virtue.

The same virtue is seen as inherent to the format of the medal, in distinction to other kindred forms. The most closely related form is the plaquette, an example of which is Alberti's self-portrait. The only difference is that the latter has a plain reverse. But on account of its reverse, the plaquette is often set inside some other structure, in the same way as a gem is clasped inside a ring. Hill associates this idea with decoration. The plaquette is generally 'insignificant; all that the artist required was a pleasant piece of relief' (1978:15). By contrast, 'the true medal is self-contained' (1912:8). It cannot be subordinated to a larger structure. Although it does not form an explicit argument, Hill's prose is ordered in a manner that links the self-contained and complete nature of the medal with its ability to express the character and personality of those people it depicts. His books *Portrait Medals of Italian Artists of the Renaissance* (1912:8) and *Medals of the Renaissance* in each case follow a description of the medal's 'independent' format with an assertion that the medal is a particularly adept form for the portrayal of the '*person*' [author's emphasis] (1978:14-15). In this view, autonomy and completeness are important similarities at the level of structure, similarities that both the portrait medal and the person share.

The ideal of completeness is perhaps most explicitly stated where Hill describes his numismatic method (1978:21):

> The method which the critic who is studying medals – or indeed any work of art – should adopt seems to me to be that he should begin with the general impression and end with the details. That is to say, if a certain medal strikes him at first sight as being in the same manner as an identified group which goes by the name of an artist, he may then set to work to examine it, to see whether the details, such as lettering, stops, treatment of hair, border, and the like confirm to the general impression. Even if they do, he must still be ready to admit, on necessity, that these

> resemblances may be due to imitation – a question of which the general spirit of the work will perhaps afford the only criterion.

In other words, the 'general spirit' of the object is the critic's first and last recourse, a totalising impression that identifies the author; as we will see, this idea is fundamental to the method of connoisseurship as it is practiced by Bernard Berenson, the most important English speaking connoisseur, or in a specifically numismatic context, Stephen Scher. Despite his work as a cataloguer, Hill has little time for those who see the attribution and cataloguing of work as in itself a worthy goal. Attribution is only important in as much as it enables works to be considered together, as products of an artist's single 'mind' (1978:21). In this way, the artist's mind is made accessible by virtue of the material object of the medal, and yet it also exceeds these material limitations: the artist's mind acts *through* the medal, rather than being *of* the medal; or more precisely through a series of medals, like a constellation of thoughts that together form an image of the single mind. It is for this reason, in Hill's judgement, that the medals made by the 'painter' Pisanello are 'cultural' products rather than simple objects of the knowledge of craftsmanship. This is the exactly the same process of transformation or transcendence as is conveyed by Vasari's concept of *disegno* – we will come back to this later – but in Hill's writing these rules of transference already reflect the increasingly institutionalised distinction between ideas of art and craft that was developing throughout the Edwardian period.

As a portrait medium, the medal also offers access to the people whom it depicts. Numismatic literature is abundant with enthusiastic judgements of character. Of Pisanello's *Palaeologus* medal, Hill writes that it 'successfully [captures] the character of the sitter – in this case the handsome, half oriental, somewhat effeminate, picturesque, but always dignified emperor' (1978:37). Unfortunately, such judgements of character are not always in agreement. Roberto Weiss was a scholar of Renaissance culture who wrote on medals, and who taught at University College London for the whole of his academic career; although he was not an art historian *per se* he was a leading scholar of Italian humanism, and he published quite extensively on medals. He also formed a

private collection that was unrivalled in Britain at the time of his death (Rubenstein 2004:unpaginated). His work on *Pisanello's Medallion of the Emperor John VIII Palaeologus*, which was published by the British Museum, expresses the same confidence in the ability to judge a character from an image as Hill does. His reading of the *Palaeologus* medal, however, is markedly different (Weiss 1966:18):

> The inner qualities of the portrayed are rendered here with a realism which strives to show every facet of his personality. The full mouth, with the slightly protruding upper lip covered by the moustache, suggests a mixture of cruelty and cunning. It is the mouth of a man who cannot be trusted, and this, together with the long and thin hooked nose and the small, almost slit eyes, do not certainly reveal a very engaging personality.

Although not actually hostile, Hill's reading seems to associate orientalism with effeminacy and lack of substance. By contrast, Weiss' judgement borders on racial antipathy. Both of these judgements are dubious to a contemporary reader; but at the time, as can be deduced from the tone of the language used, they were expressed with confidence. Having assessed the completeness of the medal, the critic feels licenced to judge the character in the portrayal. This process recalls Petrarch's association of appearance and quality, in which he instructed the Holy Roman Emperor more than half a millennium previously. Numismatic method still relies on the connoisseur's eye as an arbiter of truth. Scher's foreword to the landmark catalogue *Currency of Fame*, written in 1994 when he was guest curator at the Frick Collection and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, describes the scholar's 'instinct for quality and authenticity… naturally endowed' that guarantees authorship and the merit of its products (1994:28). The construction of this endowment as natural is surely somewhat problematic.

To summarise the numismatic literature described so far: Pisanello's work is admired for its originality as well as for its excellence. It is considered to be recognisably distinct, in a way that is qualitatively good (Scher 1994:44). In his ability to transcribe the inner life of his sitters on to the surface of a medal, Pisanello's work has many followers, but few true predecessors. The

individuality that it expresses encompasses the individuality of the artistic author, as well as the unique identity of the people that these objects portray. In reviewing the numismatic literature from Hill to Scher, a sense can be gained that an idea of wholeness in design finds its correlation in wholeness of form and facture; that personality and authorship are written into the material object by the artist's intelligent hand; that this free-standing and independent art form is uniquely adapted to the portrayal of the individual; moreover, that this is mirrored in the capacity of the artist's critic to read his work, and to judge. The scholarly focus of these numismatists is not so much to catalogue twin-sided, round, metal objects, but to catalogue a tradition of the individual that that is exemplified by Pisanello's portrait medals, and the work made in his tradition. Sir Mark Jones, former director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, is explicit on this point. The introduction to his book *The Art of The Medal* describes the form's 'utter dependence on the cult of the individual', and the new 'autonomous tradition of art' invented by Pisanello (1979a:10-11). This is a tradition that set the limits of focus for the field, and it is still evident today; but there are more modern scholarly developments, and these must be dealt with also.

The British Museum held a conference in 2011 to mark the 150th anniversary of the department of Coins and Medals. The published proceedings of this conference record the thoughts of a number of senior figures in British and European museums on this subject, and provide a useful record of how numismatic departments perceive themselves now, and what they see as the value of the discipline (Cook 2011). The central purpose of museum numismatics has not changed. It remains principally concerned with categorisation and the maintenance of collections. This focus is the 'operational necessity' of which von Achen speaks, but there have been developments in relation to the means by with objects are categorised. Although there is no mention in these proceedings of connoisseurship, there are several papers concerned with improvement in scientific method. In the same way as Hill saw little value in numismatics in itself, but regarded its utility as being what it could reveal about the artist's mind, the then Deputy Director of the Ashmolean

Museum, Nick Mayhew, comments that the field 'is of course only the handmaid of history and archaeology, like sigillography or pottery studies, it is an aid to study rather than an end in itself' (2011:11); what matters is the stability of numismatic objects (and Mayhew is primarily concerned with coins) as data. This idea is elaborated by the British Museum's Senior Scientist, Duncan Hook (27-33), whose contribution describes the study as one of empirical analysis by which its objects become sound facts in the service of larger historical employment; it goes without saying that complete and rational collections are important in shaping this enterprise (Williams 2011:34-41). There are several papers in these proceedings that describe what the contribution of numismatics is to other fields, including history, art history and archaeology, (i.e. Bracey 2011:44-52). One of these outlines the relationship between empirical numismatics and an increasingly interdisciplinary interpretation that draws on anthropology, social theory and material studies (Bolt, Eagleton, Gardner 2011:59-63). In the case of institutionalised research, these projects are often large, involving networks of people from different disciplines with different methodologies. As the interpretative tools of each individual strand have their own mature positions of analysis and the manner in which they yield insight into the past, the bringing together of different approaches re-problematises the issue of interpretation and the negotiations of past and present. Speaking about a specific project investigating the history of African money, the research team ask (Bolt, Eagleton, Gardner 2011:63):

> How, then, will we combine these disparate approaches, to say something new…? …historical and anthropological studies of money in Africa have very different methodologies, different evidence bases, and ask different questions of the evidence they assemble. Bringing these together in ways that do not force the past to become the servant of the present (or *vice versa*) is a challenge faced by the research team.

The position is summarised by Philip Attwood, the current Keeper of Coins and Medals at the British Museum in the conclusion of the proceedings (Attwood 2011:81):

> The traditional taxonomic numismatic approach remains the core of much of what we do but the ability to contextualise and think in interdisciplinary (or multidisciplinary) terms has never been more important.

Of course, numismatic literature often proceeds from a broad context towards a narrow focus, as in assessing objects for inclusion in even the most proscriptive catalogue, other forms of art are referenced. This is of necessity. Iconography – which remains a very important method for classification – can only proceed with reference to a source. Thus, in all of the numismatic authors mentioned above, references can be found to other graphic and plastic arts, including literature. But once the messy business of comparison is done, the natural limits of the corpus are reasserted. The focus remains inward looking, and the principal task remains naming and cataloguing.

In contrast, much of the academic literature seeks to follow and to draw conclusions from the promiscuous relations of the medal. Roberto Weiss' study of the *Palaeologus* medal is typical of this, a work of 'comparative art history' that explores both the origins and the '*fortuna*' (the afterlife of the image, its repetition) of the medal, its relation to arts that precede and follow it (1966:5,20). Most of the authors who work in this vein are not associated with museums, but a notable exception is Luke Syson whose early career was spent at the British Museum in the Department of Coins and Medals. Syson also contributed to the proceedings on the 150th anniversary of the department – he is now a very senior curator, but his approach is consistently broad, and his published writing is much more concerned with the larger problems of culture and representation than is typical of his museum colleagues. Syson treats the 'minor arts', gems, statuettes, medals, dishes and all manner of portrait-bearing things as a continuous whole, for what they can reveal about the image-culture of their day (Syson 2011; Syson and Thornton 2001; Syson and Mann 1998). His paper begins with a description of the typical art historian's attitude to medals, which is that they are 'too difficult and obscure', and thus are 'best left to specialists' (2011:53), but he goes on to demonstrate exactly how useful they can be as a way of contextualising painting and drawing broader conclusions, in

this case the meaning of Bellini's famous painting of Doge Leonardo Loredan (1501-2) and the deliberately evasive and multiple manner in which 'unrepresentable' ideas of the soul are portrayed in art of this period (55,53-58).

Tanja Jones, Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Alabama, adopts a similarly broad approach in her recent doctoral thesis (2011). This considers an iconographically related group of books, paintings and religious jewellery. She uses this group to contextualise, and then to read, a set of fifteenth century medals. Her interest is in uncovering the connections between the courts of Italy, France and Byzantium, and the political, religious and ideological value of the medal in this context, ideas that she has explored in a number of papers, and which, as they touch directly on the object of focus for this research, are dealt with in more detail in the chapter that follows (2015; 2014; 2010; 2003). Tanja Jones, Luke Syson and Roberto Weiss are all untypical of this second school of interpretation in having returned to the medal over a long period of time, and in many studies. Most authors who adopt an open approach to the subject treat the medal as one of a number of possible exemplary case studies, and are more interested in an historical or anthropological idea that could take a range of other objects as its proof.

Other academics have considered the medal as a tool. Minou Schraven analyses material and textual evidence for the use of medals as a device to extend the power of their patrons through their deposition in building foundations (2009). The concepts that she employs in her analysis are taken from anthropology. Like T. Jones, although the medals themselves are among the sources used, these are heavily contextualised with reference to letters, accounts, and treatises. Connoisseurship of the sort employed by Hill or Scher plays no part in their analysis, and the reader would search in vain for judgements of character.

Different forms of evidence are prioritised in each case. Representative of the older numismatic school, Hill, Scher, and Weiss may make use of other forms of evidence, particularly in iconographic analysis; but their first and ultimate object is the medal, judged by a trained eye. When they read the

character of a person through an object, they do so in a way that involves them in its construction, and which fulfils its purpose as an art of human representation. This is an abstraction from the material object of the medal, but it is an abstraction that the art form is designed to fulfil, and that is negotiated through the material encounter. By contrast, most modern authors strive to preserve a critical distance, and turn instead to non-expressive forms of evidence, such as documents. As a result, while the older school of literature gives a sense of what the medal *is*, the latter dwells more on evidence of what it *does*, or rather what it did. For this reason, in most modern literature, the materiality of the medal is of secondary importance, in that it is talked about, but not experienced.

2.6 Conclusion

It is useful to conclude this literature review by making these two distinct tendencies in interpretation and use quite clear. Numismatic study is typified by a comparatively closed modality. Its aim is to categorise, to date and to attribute. Beyond this, for many of its principal authors, secure attribution supports a humanistic history of art by which artists and their sitters are better apprehended as people. As is clear from this review, there is a tradition of connoisseurship in numismatics that treats the medal as a site for instinctual evaluations of personality and authorship. For some authors this instinct is both an instrument for attribution as well as its principal goal. Here the materially specific and finite aim of categorising is ultimately a question of interpretation, dependent on ideas of quality and personality. This is hardly surprising, as it fulfils what the art medal is designed to achieve. Contemporaneous accounts of the Renaissance portrait, the use of coin portraits as moral instruments, and the evidence of the medals themselves, all demonstrate that this form is intended to combine a mimetic portrait with an idea of personal 'air', and to move from likeness and similarity to qualities of personality and virtue across its two faces. Connoisseurial method in numismatics simply mirrors the same process, by taking quality as the basis for instinctual judgements of authorship.

By contrast the academic literature is open in its approach. It seeks to synthesise data into conclusions of a higher order. This literature does not offer judgements of quality; and only rarely is its ultimate goal a better understanding of the medal itself. These differences exemplify one of the problems of interpretation, namely that the critical methods (as well as the pressures of maintaining collections and so forth) serve to construct the field and shape the object of enquiry.

The epistemological difference between the numismatic and academic schools bears immediately on the question of the material and content. In order to prepare the groundwork for new understanding of this question, chapter four presents exemplary statements of method that are relevant to the study of the field: iconography, connoisseurship, and the analysis of agency.

Numismatics matured as a modern field of study during the nineteenth century. More generally, this is the period during which connoisseurship was formalised as a method by, among others, Giovanni Morelli (1816-1891). The most forceful numismatist, Sir George Hill (1867-1948), was a close contemporary with the preeminent Anglo-Saxon connoisseur, Bernard Berenson (1865-1959). Unfortunately, with the exception of Scher's *Connoisseurship of the Medal* (1993), in any case a less insightful document than Berenson's *Rudiments of Connoisseurship* ([1902]1920), there are no explicit statements of method that have come out of the field itself. This is true in relation to iconographic method and theories of agency. For this reason, the three texts dealt with in chapter four are drawn from other areas of art historical study. They have been chosen for their clarity of expression, for their impact and legacy, and for expressing each approach in its standard form.

Before turning to this methodological and theoretical work, however, it is necessary to consider the context within which this research will be useful, and to consider the first purpose of this research: the art medal as a practice for rehearsing new authorial identities between craft and art.

3. Contemporary Contexts

3.0 Introduction: the Context for Research

All research is conducted in – and for – a context particular to that research. The last section identified the two dominant schools of interpretation of art medals, the numismatic and the academic.

Work happens in social settings, each with its own set of ingrained histories and institutions. The modern conception of what an artist is began to emerge in the early 15th century. *Constantine* is contemporary with the beginning of this process; Alberti's self-portrait plaquette is an important landmark on that road; and early works of history and theory such as Vasari's *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* of 1550 served to formalise art as a distinct field of practice, with its own standards. How any artist acts today, or describes his or her self, is a matter of negotiation; the point here is that practice does not emerge *ex nihilo*. It has both a personal and a social history. To identify a maker of images as 'an artist' is to make a tacit claim against an inheritance. This is true both for the artist as well as for the person making the judgement. The trouble for clear thinking about artistic practice is that institutions, aesthetic values and histories become naturalised, and in becoming naturalised they become invisible. We come to think of an appreciation or talent for art as somehow natural. We forget that the culture of fine art was constructed between the mid-16th century and the late 19th, just as we forget our own personal histories of learnt response.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that all culture is an expression of learnt experience and habits. Each of us acquires a *habitus*. He describes this as a 'structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices' (Bourdieu 1984:170), a system of values and cognitive structures that are sedimented within an individual and which act as the internal representations of socially determined phenomena. The *habitus* of an individual determines their worldview to such an extent that the social and the learnt appear given. These ideas are familiar in theory, but precisely because

they are so thoroughly naturalised it is harder to hold them in mind in relation to one's own lived experience. One of the reasons why this research is useful is that it addresses the habituated elaboration of meaning in relation to the cultures of craft and art in order to think beyond the fraught correspondence of these two terms. In particular, it investigates the imbrication and mutual immanence of content and material, regardless of whether this is considered to be craft-like or art-like.

Medals are propitious objects for asking questions of this sort. As Mark Jones puts it, the medal is 'neither art, because its skills are those of the craftsman, nor craft because it serves no evident utilitarian need, it belongs to the early Renaissance, before the division of the arts from the crafts' (1986:15). The medal is a useful object of study because it was born immediately prior to the first trauma of separation of the arts from the crafts: its makers would not be sensitive as we are now to the distinction between the utilitarian arts and the fine arts. But in the literature review we have seen the degree to which, for instance, George Hill's judgements about art and craft are bound up with a tradition of interpretation of 'knowledge' on the one hand and 'culture' on the other; the medals he studied may have been made before that division became clear, but their liminal status has become increasingly apparent over time. Pisanello's *Palaeologus* is the Magnetic North by which the field is organised; but this legacy is built on emphasising what is 'artistic' about it, and suppressing the legacy of the earlier medal on which it depends. For this reason, of all of the medals in the canon, the *Constantine* has the greatest potential to disrupt our current thinking about the medal.

This research evolved in stages. In its first iteration it was concerned with using the art medal as a case study for rethinking the relationship between art and craft. This work is useful but limited, in that – to a certain extent, as will become apparent – the cultural relativism implicit in the project both prejudges and prescribes the outcome. For this reason, the project eventually took a different line of enquiry to address the issue of the folding of material and culture from a different and more fundamental angle. This work is presented in chapters four to six. Nevertheless, the earlier work remains useful for several

reasons. Firstly, it describes the context for this research, and the context within which its findings are useful. Secondly, it presents the fullest picture of the problem that this research is addressed at resolving. To summarise therefore, this chapter tests the starting premise for this research: that the art medal can function as a site where the roles of author and observer are developed in an unusual and unusually productive manner for fine art practice, as a zone where fresh ideas of authorship can be rehearsed. As will be seen below, the art medal can function in exactly this way, albeit within limits. This chapter is useful to the thesis as a whole in pointing to a more fundamental question addressed in chapter four, which is to consider not so much *what* the art medal means, but rather *how* it is meaningful.

3.1 The Separation of Art from Craft

People that teach in art schools often encourage students to 'think through making'. This phrase is something of a cliché, but it reflects something of the nature of ideation in creative practice. Like many other artists, when I am making things I feel that intention is an emergent property, unlike design, which is abstract and prior to realisation. There has been some useful thinking on this subject in recent years coming out of New Materialism (Lange-Berndt 2015; Malafouris 2013; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012; Barad 2007); but as will be seen in chapter 4, much of this work emphasises the agency of matter (i.e. Barad 2007) at the expense of the author, and seems to foreclose the possibility of 'I'-centred practices such as portraiture (i.e. Malafouris 2013). This is a stimulating problem for this research, because this project investigates how people make material images in order to promote an enduring sense of identity.

The original stimulus for the research was a sense of discomfort in relation to the contemporary culture of fine art. This had not been brought into a defined focus by the time the project started, but broadly speaking it covered a frustration at the poverty of understanding of – and interest in – how art is made, and what art is, in itself, as a materially mediated and embodied practice. The figures of the artist and the craftsman sit quite differently in relation to their material. When art is discussed, ideation is prioritised; craft, by contrast,

tends to be about utility and realisation: art is somehow abstract, free, undefined; craft is concrete. The first iteration of this research project aimed to use the art medal as an object for analysis because it is neither art nor craft, and to use this as a means to rethink these two cultures. This chapter begins with a short literature review of the historical differences between art and craft before giving at greater length some specific examples of how these differences play out in practice.

3.1.1 The Distinction of Art from Craft: a Literature Review

One of the classic narratives of craft is that it emerged alongside fine art as its subaltern other. This history is recounted by the art historians Margot and Rudolf Wittkower in *Born Under Saturn* ([1963]2007), by Edward Lucie-Smith in *The Story of Craft* (1981:142-184), and by Richard Sennett in *The Craftsman* (2008:65-74).

The shape of the story is shared by all of the principal authors, but there is disagreement as to where the historical moment of scission should be placed. The art historian Georges Didi-Huberman sees Giorgio Vasari's publication of *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* in 1550 as a crucial moment. Vasari's book invents art history as a discrete field. As Didi-Huberman explains, the chief tool of Vasari's looking is his library of drawings, which are ordered according to an image of progress in which each artist of value finds his place. This teleological model of art raises the field above the contingent and the local; and because in Vasari's conception art has its own direction, it is self-generating, a seed that grows according to its internal logic; this marks it out as an autonomous field of practice and study. Seen from the perspective of the art historian, where a detail in an artist's work fails to fit the model, this embarrassment is obviated by virtue of a concept of drawing (*disegno*) that pulls the concrete and the abstract together even as it keeps them apart. The modern term 'design' can function in the same way, in that a design can be an abstract intention or a physical blueprint, or both at the same time (see also Ingold 2013:51,71,125). By means of this conceptual and semantic *legerdemain*, from 1550 onwards, art is granted a habit of looking that gives access from the

physical to the mental, and in the process the contingent and material objects of art are made to remain in contact with some kind of eternal quality or claim (2005:53-84).

Didi-Huberman's approach is critical rather than social, and certainly the intellectual groundwork that made art philosophical began in the 16th century; but the craft historian Paul Greenhalgh describes the typical emphasis on the Renaissance as an over-simplification (1997:26). He locates the crucial moment in the taxonomising spirit of the 18th century, in which craft's constituent elements begin to share a *salon de refusés*. The elements that are inadmissible to the academy are 'decorative art, the vernacular and the politics of work' (1997:25). At the same time hierarchies emerge within artistic practice, with history painting being a considerably more masculine and intellectual pursuit than the domestic and decorative still life (see also Bryson 1990:7-8); ornament sits right at the bottom of the ladder. One of the features of this scission as it emerges is that history painting and other megalographic artistic practices are described as though their language is universal, whereas those for the crafts are specific and local: thus Sir Joshua Reynolds, first president of the Royal Academy, elaborates a universal theory of art in his *Discourses* (a series of lectures given between 1769 and 1790 and later published), whereas the designer Thomas Chippendale offers pragmatic guidance in his book *The Director* (1762), (see Lucie-Smith 1981:165-166).

As the salient features of art's parturition from craft are constant in these two accounts, there is nothing to be gained here from weighing the merits of the respective claims for the Renaissance or the 18th century as its site. In any case, the difference between these two cultures is continuously re-emphasised and redrawn across a range of different borders, for like all differences between two essentially rather similar things, the distinction needs to be continuously maintained. The cleavage of art from craft is best thought of as a recurring trauma. Glenn Adamson, by far the most influential contemporary author on the subject, has written two books that chart the histories and means by which craft is defined, the processes by which it is distinguished from, variously: fine art; metropolitan culture; professionalism and / or amateurism, (*Thinking*

Through Craft 2007); and industry (*The Invention of Craft* 2013). Of the various points of distinction, one of the most important is the politics of labour. What it is that is considered *political* about craft is differently construed within the literature, and this difference reveals why Adamson's approach is so useful and distinct from the craft intellectuals who have preceded him. For instance, Paul Greenhalgh sees Britain's Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th century as the clearest embodiment of craft's historical project. It is, he writes, 'the most articulate material outcome of a generation of brilliant positivist activity. Its elements had an ethical and aesthetic logic beyond the circumscribed world of art practice' (48). By contrast, through a process of careful innuendo rather than overt contempt, he traduces contemporary art as a form of 'irony' (43). The idea that craft offers a form of empirical, practical and political engagement is also at the core of Sennett's writing (2008). For both authors, craft is political in an organisational and economic manner.

What is unusual about Adamson is that his politics is also personal: craft and art are not simply positive practices. They are identities that can be played with. In this way his interpretation turns the marginalisation of craft on its head and it becomes an opportunity for transgression. In part this freedom stems from Adamson's narrower terms: he is much more concerned with individual outcomes and cultural peaks than either Sennett or Greenhalgh. His approach is to borrow terms from cultural theory in order to provide orientation points for interpretation. *Thinking Through Craft* abounds with examples of artists successfully treating craft 'as an escape-hatch – a means to think outside the narrow confines of the autonomous artwork' (68) whether that is an idea of the vernacular, (which Adamson describes as 'pastoral'), or simply a flavour of abjection. So, although all narratives of craft diagnose a taint of inferiority, Adamson's logic allows this very inferiority to be exploited and rethought. It is curious that he should choose two modern academy artists to illustrate this point – Mike Kelley and Tracey Emin (158-163) – as their adoption of craft practice could be read as a form of cultural colonisation; but other artists and craftspeople have also followed this logic, and adopted the subaltern status of craft to political ends for the uses of feminist, pacifist and queer protest. These

have been well documented elsewhere (i.e. Buszek 2011, esp.175-242), and can be seen in broader culture in movements such as 'Stitch and Bitch' and other forms of 'craftivism' (Black and Burisch 2011:204-221).

A great deal of art since the 1960s has been concerned with personal identity, and this inversion of the subaltern, a celebration of the forbidden or suppressed as a space for fresh practice, could be seen as a move rather typical of 'fine art' thinking. There is no logical and consistent way in which craft can be defined as separate from art; but there are a range of behaviours, values and habits of thought that construct the difference between the two, and this is most evident in relation to attitudes toward craft. Although a lot of art after the readymade is no longer crafted in any real sense, historically, of course, it has been; and there are still painters and sculptors for whom the *making* of work is important. But, as Adamson observes it is a practice of choosing what to frame and what to see that really matters (2007:9-37).

Adamson's starting point is the practice of critique and negation that was developed by members of the Frankfurt School in the early part of the last century, and in particular by Theodor Adorno (9). Adorno claimed a utopian purpose for art (1984): it should be a space within which a new reality could be configured, beyond the alienated labour conditions of the twentieth century. Adorno's argument is that artworks are distinguished from the empirical world by the logic of their nature; they are a representation and therefore a kind of withdrawal; but by withdrawing, art sanctions the priority of the world from which it has withdrawn. In this way, the autonomy of art comes to serve the very order that it should critique, and the only solution to this bind is that it must critique itself. This purposeful doubt is a powerful idea and it remains an important part of the culture of contemporary art, whether that is an habituated critical stance, or, as authors like John Roberts argue, a philosophically coherent and still vital project (2010). The point is that Adamson associates Adorno's logic of internal critique with self-abnegation because the purpose of art is to gesture beyond itself and to exceed its material means. In this way, even though the making is what brings art into being, the makerly – all of those marks that bear witness to its contingency – must either fall away from

view or else yield intellectual potential. The history and intellectual underpinning of this move belongs to the early 20th century; but, as is the case with the 16th century invention of art history, or the 18th century ordering of culture, the direction of the move is the same: from the physical to the philosophical.

To summarise this short review, although art and craft are imbricated elements of our material culture, there is a political and social element to their distinction, with craft being associated with the politics of labour, decorative art and the vernacular. The positive aspect of craft's subaltern conception is a tendency towards the pragmatic and the empirical. Art, by contrast - and despite its historical association with painting and sculpture - is typified by its movement from the physical to the mental. This is both liberating and limiting, liberating because it offers artists a zone of free practice, and limiting because its freedom of promise is based on a renunciation of its material supports and this immediately closes options down. It is for this reason that some artists see a form of liberty in the constrained culture of craft, and this is Adamson's great realisation.

We turn now to see how the relationship between craft and art plays out in practice, and in particular, in medallic work.

3.2 Alexandre Charpentier: Knowledge versus Culture

Alexandre-Louis-Marie Charpentier (1856–1909) was a French artist who was productive in the spheres of interior decoration, sculpture, and the beaux-arts. While a lot of his work was unique, other pieces were designed to be reproduced and made available for commercial sale. Charpentier was a prolific low relief modeller. He made a number of medals and plaquettes throughout his career. Although he did not live so long as Sir George Hill, the two men are close contemporaries, and the example of Charpentier's work provides a useful counterpart to Hill's interpretation.

Charpentier found it tedious to repeat or edition his own work, but when this labour was outsourced he took an active interest in the craftspeople with whom he worked. The status of the artisan and the labourer had been brought

to public attention in the late nineteenth century by a series of labour reforms intended to improve working conditions, and, at the same time, many trades were seeing challenge from increased mechanisation and industrialisation, and this affected both rural and urban labour. A burgeoning interest in the figures of the workman and the peasant – *la plèbe et la glèbe* – was met by a move away from academic allegory in sculpture, and a declining appetite across Europe for the rash of public memorials to leading citizens (Curtis 1999:5-50; Elsen 1974:3-21). For these reasons, images of labour appeared modern, and this can be seen in the example of Charpentier's own work.

Charpentier's medals and plaquettes are preserved in several notable collections, including the V&A, the Metropolitan Museum and the Fitzwilliam, Cambridge.[2] Charpentier's medal *Masons* (**figure 12** and below, c.1905, Fitzwilliam) depicts on its obverse two craftsmen positioning a dressed block of stone, carefully and with evident labour. It is a matter-of-fact composition. The

Alexandre Charpentier *Masons*, c.1905

[2] The collection of the Fitzwilliam houses six different objects by the artist. A patron identified as 'H.Newton' gifted all of these bar one to the museum in 1938, and their accession was not properly recorded at the time of donation; 'J.McClain' gifted the other object in 1907, and this predates the modern numbering of these objects. For this reason, the Fitzwilliam objects lack accession numbers.

face of the block with which the two men struggle is exactly parallel to the plane of the medal's surface: it is straight on to the viewer. This composition emphasises the mass of the stone, and just as much as the block is face-on, the men are turned towards the block, addressing the block rather than the onlooker. The physical effort of the workmen is clear as they strain against the orthogonal object. This medal is not a portrait; it is a scene of labour. *Masons* depicts the delegation of toil: it is not the job of an architect to do this work; the work of the architect is discharged with a ruler and fine nib, the grid-like lines of which are evoked by the intersecting lines of scaffolding and the course of the wall.

Masons is a struck medal. Striking involves the application under great pressure of a resistant die to a bronze billet called a 'flan'. As the flan is squeezed against the die, it is forced into the die's concavities and thereby it acquires an image. Striking is a staged process of facture, because – with only a very few exceptions – the dye is made by a specialist craftsperson or a mechanised process, from a low-relief model that has been made by the artist. For this reason, striking is somewhat more attenuated in its expressive potential than is the case with lost-wax casting. Striking is an appropriate form of facture for this medal. The method of making is inferable in several ways. Firstly, the ground of a struck medal is nearly always non-porous, smooth and very finely grained. Because cast work is made from cooled liquid metal, its ground is inevitably very slightly uneven and minutely pitted; in addition to which, the ground of such a medal is made rather than machined, and for this reason it may also appear modelled. Struck work can also be inferred from the clearly defined nature of its planes, and the clarity with which they are arranged. This is particularly notable in this medal in the clothing of the figure who is bending down to remove or adjust one of the rollers on which the block sits, and in particular the planes of the man's trousers. The medal's form is very crisp, defined and contained, and somewhat mechanical in its appearance. The subject matter is similarly factual. The viewer is being shown what labour is. *Masons* is like a photograph.

Another medal by Charpentier takes the process of striking as its subject. It was commissioned by the company *Duval Janvier* and made in 1902 (**figure 13** and overleaf, V&A A.32-1978; see van Alfen 2017:52-54; Vandenbrouck-Przybylski 2012:31; M. Jones 1979:129). On one side a worker can be seen operating a *balancier*, a kind of press used at that time to produce struck medals such as *Masons* discussed above. The man operating the *balancier* is stripped to the waist, and his face is turned away from view: he is not an artist but a labourer. Who he is as an individual is of no concern. What matters is the muscle-bound breadth of his back, stretched across the medal's surface, the motive force driving the

Alexandre Charpentier *Duval Janvier*, 1902, obverse

perpendicular space of the press. Associated machinery can be seen in the background: this might be a reduction machine, a device for mechanically scaling-down designs (V&A 2017:online). This service, for which the company was famous, is efficiently depicted on the reverse (**figure 14**). Against a field bearing the text '*Réduction et Frappe de Médailles*' (reduction and striking of medals) the obverse is repeated three times, successively smaller on each occasion. In this way, the struck medal is a pictorial representation as well as a physical demonstration of the processes that the company sought to advertise.

The sculptor employs this self-referential method on other advertisements. An example of this is *Muller Stoneware Manufactory*, which advertises a stoneware factory, and is made, quite fittingly, from that material (1897, Metropolitan Museum, Inv. 1989.8, **figure 15**). Comparative analysis of the two adverts shows some instructive differences between how the two figures are presented as workers. The metalworker on *Duval Janvier* is turned away from the viewer, and engaged in operating a machine: in this way the machine comes to dominate the process and the piece, the limits of which are contiguous with the pictorial frame of the medal itself. By contrast, the ceramic worker is shown at the end of the making process, given room, holding in his upturned hand a figure of *Athena Parthenos,* his own pose echoing that of the statue.

The sculpture *Athena Parthenos* is lost, but it is known from descriptions by ancient historians such as Pausanias as well as from its representation on Classical cameos and larger sculptural copies (**figure 16**; Pausanias 1918:27). It is a work of immense sculptural significance, the central sculpture at the heart of the Parthenon, made by the most lauded sculptor of Classical antiquity: Phidias. The elegance of the reference in Charpentier's plaque is that *Athena Parthenos* typically holds in *her* upturned hand a sculpture of Nike (Victory); here Athena herself plays Nike's role. She is the craftsman's conquest. In most representations, *Athena Parthenos* is richly covered in attributions and iconography. Charpentier has chosen to depict the figure from the side, and to frame only one detail: in the centre of her shield is the Medusa's head, harnessing the Gorgon's power of petrification. Though there is no other evidence to support this interpretation, it seems likely that this is a reference to the petrification at the heart of the process that is being advertised here: the metamorphosis of soft clay into stoneware. It is notable that there is nothing mechanical about this image. The craftsman, despite his curiously blank expression, addresses the viewer as an individual, at the centre of a representation that frames his practice in terms of classical antiquity and magical efficacy. In a cast bronze copy of the advert from the same year the worker appears even more central to the process (**figure 17**, Met 03.7.26). By

contrast, in the medal of *Duval Janvier* it is the equipment that dominates – in that medal, the labourer is a source of muscle, not intelligence.

As a business, Duval Janvier offered sculptors and designers an effective outsourcing of the force and dextrous skill needed to made medals. It is clear why this service would be attractive to medal makers, but in his book on *Portrait Medals* of 1912, published a decade after Charpentier's medal for Duval Janvier was made, George Hill bemoans the invention of the reduction machine as an egregious bowdlerisation of the art (1912:19):

> The majority of modern medallists seek to evade the difficulties which lie before them by designing on a large scale and reducing mechanically from their model to the size required for a final result. Nemesis follows quickly on their laziness; for neither modelling nor design can be truly translated on to a smaller scale except by an intelligent hand.

Hill's phrase the 'intelligent hand' identifies what is at stake here. It is hard to see what value there would be to having the artist operate the *balancier* himself – this is mere physical effort; but Hill's judgement is that some processes are the necessary responsibility of the artist: modelling is ideation, and this cannot be subcontracted or mechanised except at the cost of artistic quality. Of course, questions of 'quality' are aesthetic judgements rather than empirical measurements, and, for Hill, the capacity for aesthetic rather than metrical judgement is precisely the difference between an artist and a mechanic – or for that matter, a machine.

In Charpentier's work a correspondence can be seen between the subject depicted and the processes used to make the object. The two struck medals depicting scenes of labour, masonry and medal-making, can be compared with two cast bronze plaquettes – by the same artist – that depict the arts of *Sculpture* and *Painting*. These plaquettes were made around the same time as *Muller Stoneware Manufactory* and certainly before 1903 (**figure 18** and next page, V&A 328-1901 and **figure 19**, 327-1901). They also show people at work, and there are some similarities with the struck works described above. The artist is not concerned with the biographical identity of the people that are

Alexandre Charpentier, *Sculpture*, c.1897

depicted. They are profiles rather than portraits, and the figure of *Sculpture* has her back to the viewer, her shoulder and hair somewhat obscuring her face. In both cases, again like the struck medals, just over half of the available surface is given over to their tools, and, in a sense therefore, their labour. So there is a consistency between all four metal plaquettes, *Duval-Janvier*, *Masons*, *Painting* and *Sculpture*; despite these similarities, however, the images of the arts are of a quite different order from the social-realist medals. Certainly, the two young representatives of the arts have the physiognomies and haircuts of ordinary people, and in this way a kind of realism is evident in the work; but the figures are nude, and these depictions are preposterous unless these figures are understood as personifications of their arts. This introduces a self-conscious and symbolic element to the work, which can also be seen in the advert for *Muller Stoneware Manufactory*, but that is wholly absent in the scenes of stonework and striking.

The plaquettes of the arts belong to a related group in Charpentier's output that show individuals singing, or playing musical instruments, or – albeit less frequently – engaged in games like chess or dominoes. The majority of these figures are young women, though (as *Painting*) others are epicene boys or youths. None of the figures in this group are adult men. It is entirely conventional from classical antiquity to the late nineteenth century for

personifications to be depicted as unclothed women, but only rarely as unclothed men (see van Straten 1994:25-44). These personifications should be distinguished from other more decorative works that Charpentier produced in which the female body is displayed as an object for sexual interest, for instance *Door Furniture* (**figure 20**, c.1900 V&A 329-1901); though there is some overlap between these two categories in plaquettes in which the whole female figure is shown, examples of which are the plaquettes of *Dance* and *Female Figure playing a bass-viol* (pre.1903, Metropolitan Museum 03.7.22 and 03.7.19). This overlapping group notwithstanding, most of these personifications are quite demure, many of them being closely cropped torsos, and nearly all of them turned away from the viewer. In addition to these two groups of female figures – the personifying and the provocative – can be added a third group of social-realist representations of women. Representative of this third group is the struck medal *Mother Nursing her Baby* (**figure 21**, 1899; V&A 840-1900).

Sculpture and *Painting* are not representatives of a social genera or trade, neither are they mere decoration; they are symbolic representations of their arts. That the objects of their arts are not shown is significant to their meaning. The painting and the sculpture on which these people work both sit outside the pictorial space of the medal. Because the viewer is not shown these, there is no suggestion that the arts are limited to their finite forms – there is no equivalent of the block that dominates the *Masons*, or even the Athena that is the skilful craftsman's prize. What are represented in these plaques is not so much the specific processes of *Painting* and *Sculpture* as the abstract potential of these arts. This is infinite rather than finite, ideal rather than real. This is a consistent feature in all of the personifications that Charpentier produced: the viewer is shown the chisel and the paintbrush, but never the object itself, except in those cases where the worker is an adult male, in which case the artwork on display is an object of craft, not art. Whereas Charpentier's scenes of labour were struck, it is entirely commensurate with the subject of these other works that they are cast. Casting is expressive in a way that striking is not; it preserves the hand of the artist in the work in a manner that is impossible with striking. Whereas the

struck works are finite, factual, and realistic, these cast works are suggestive, evocative and ideal.

In these medals it is clear that Charpentier is using different processes to establish the modality of the subject matter. In his landmark work of 1920, George Hill presents an analysis of the difference between Italian and German Renaissance medals that opens up exactly the same distinctions in quality of process ([1920]1978:101-116). Whereas the distinction in Charpentier's work is between lost-wax casting and striking, the distinction in Hill's analysis is between the Italian predilection for the wax model, (subsequently cast into lead, reworked by the artist, and then sand-cast), and the German preference either for striking or the production of wooden masters for sand-casting. Lost-wax casting, like the production of a wax master, is contiguous with the artist's hand, a form of drawing; by contrast, striking or engraving a wooden pattern after a design, is more staged, more distant and more mechanical. Thus Hill admires the 'fine technical execution' of the predominantly struck German medals, but continues that this (1978:116):

> …leads one to expect more from them, and to ask for an intellectual content on a part with their manual dexterity. This lack of imagination, coupled with a high ideal of craftsmanship, corresponds in art to that characteristic of the German mind which has been expressed so incisively in the statement of a German that the Germans possess knowledge but not culture, "Kenntnis ohne Kultur".

The national slur notwithstanding, the association of different processes with a corresponding intellectual potential is identical: art is fluid, expressive, imaginative and cultural; craft is finite, dextrous, factual, and knowledgeable. In Charpentier's work we see these associations being consciously exploited, either to endow his representation of ideals with intellectual potential on the one hand, or to give weight to the witness of his realism on the other, as appropriate.

These are significant cultural distinctions that shape how work is read. As has been shown above in the case of Charpentier's work and Hill's analysis, these distinctions are consciously understood, and exploited. At this stage in

history, as was the case from the 16th century until the early 20th century, they all spring from the physical activities of hand and tool in which making is a constant. Both art and craft at this time are dextrously skilled material disciplines. What has been described is a distinction within a continuous field of material practice. But only five years after Hill's work on *Portrait Medals* was published, and three years before Hill's defamation of the German craftsman, Marcel Duchamp created a sculpture that seems to belong to an entirely different period of human history, his *Fountain* (1913), the porcelain urinal. From this point onwards the crafted element of art, the necessity of making, is disarticulated from the main body of fine art practice. This is not to say that crafted art was rendered obsolescent by Duchamp's gesture and the work that followed. Most artists in some sense still make their work; what has changed is that an artwork need not any longer *necessarily* be made – this was a genuinely new idea in artistic practice, and it took the best part of a century to propagate. Its eventual impact is that it disarticulates craft and art as *ideas* that can be quoted and used. As the example of Charpentier's work shows, artists had hitherto consciously manipulated the image of the craftsman or the artist. After Duchamp, however, the identity of the artist is unmoored from its anchor in manual ability, and it becomes available for quotation in the manner that Adamson has described.

3.3 The Medal and the Hand

The original conception of this research project was to follow Adamson's lead, and to take the art medal as a site for playing with ideas of art and craft, to see if new conceptions of authorship could be elaborated. In particular, I was interested in exploring ideas of making in artistic practice.

Why are medals propitious objects for exploring ideas of this sort?

In *The New Medallists* (2012:9-13), a book that presents a collection of work by medal makers who are relatively recent arrivals to the practice, Philip Attwood writes (9):

> The medals in this book were made to be handled as much as to be looked at. It is only by holding them in the hand and turning them over that their real power comes to the fore. Here the tactile is as important as the visual in a way that is not true of any other artistic medium…

The haptic nature of the medal was the subject of study in two papers presented at the FIDEM congress in 2012, *This Living Hand – the medal as a tangible made object* (Carpenter 2012:171-180) and *Haptic pleasures: the medal as a hand-held object* (Vandenbrouck 2012:181-188). These papers present complimentary studies of contemporary medals that seem alive to their intimate relationship with the beholder; the first considers the hand of the maker as a site of transmission, and the medal as a store of touch, a kind of battery, handed over to the holder of the medal; the second paper looks at the medal as a physical object in the hand, and pays sensitive attention to the act of holding these objects. The idea presented in these two papers – that the medal is, above all else, somehow about and for the hand – is the most important reason why the medal is a useful vehicle for thinking about craft. The hand-made, and the qualities of production that are unique to hand-crafted objects, are central to the culture and practice of craft, and in this respect the medal bears a natural affinity with that culture. But at the same time, the medal offers literary and visual modes of legibility that belong to the ocular and philosophical biases of fine art. The idea that here there is a productive tension that could be brought out, framed and exploited, follows Adamson's conception of craft and art as 'ideas' as much as empirical practices, for quotation and active creative play.

This section looks at the artist's hand in relation to work by three contemporary makers of medals, Cathie Pilkington, Felicity Powell and Chloe Shaw. Of the three contemporary artists who are considered here, Cathie Pilkington is the most explicit in her engagement with a constructive ambiguity between craft and sculpture, and, of these three artists, she engages with authorial identity in the most conscious manner, as an idea that can be adopted, adapted and manipulated. Pilkington has made few medals. Although she was not entirely new to medal making, her more recent interest was

stimulated by the invitation that she received from BAMS to make a medal that could be issued to the society's members. As Artist Secretary for the society at that time, I was responsible for making this invitation. Like a number of female British artists of her generation her work actively addresses the interrelation of art and craft as part of a broader strategy to renegotiate the terms of gendered production and high and low culture. Her broader engagement with the culture of craft and other deliberately subaltern practices are treated in two other papers that I have written about her work (Carpenter 2014; 2012b).

Whereas Pilkington treats the 'hand' predominantly as an idea, Powell and Shaw are much more direct in their approach. For them, the haptic qualities of the medal create a constructive intimacy between them as makers and their audience as viewers. But what all three artists have in common is that they address the hand as a site of making and source of meaning. These two values, of making and meaning, are very closely imbricated in the examples that follow; the section concludes with an analysis of a much older work by the Elizabethan artist Nicholas Hilliard. In this final piece, it is impossible to tease the two apart.

3.3.1 Cathie Pilkington

Pilkington's early career, and her periodic transitions between art and craft practices are outlined in the introduction to this thesis. Her work is provocatively at odds with prevalent artistic concerns. She is a figurative sculptor, and some of her work employs a very high standard of mimetic accuracy. Much of her work depicts 'cute' subjects, such as pugs, chimps, bunny rabbits, dolls and ballerinas. Her work alludes to and celebrates craft processes. In lots of ways, it exhibits poor artistic 'taste', remaining just as thematic and aesthetic as it appeared to Glynn Williams two decades ago. Her interest in the medal is entirely consistent with her flirtation with modes of expression that do not seem quite in keeping with contemporary artistic orthodoxy.

Her most important medal is *Jumping Jack* (2012), a small struck object that, when spun, creates a crude animation of a jumping doll, in the manner of a

Cathie Pilkington, *Jumping Jack*, 2011

flipbook cartoon. This was commissioned by BAMS and it appeared on the front and back covers of *The Medal* in Spring 2012. Unlike most of the medals that BAMS has issued, *Jumping Jack* was made available in two editions. The larger number was simply patinated (**figure 22**). These were sold for £225; but a smaller number were hand-painted, and these sold for £300 (**figure 23** and previous page). This smaller edition was remarkably popular, and it sold out within a couple of weeks. The underlying form was the same in each case – the only difference was the surface treatment. A company based in Birmingham, Thomas Fattorini, that manufactures small-scale ornamental objects, such as medallic honours and military uniform buttons, struck the medal. The basic process is the same as that depicted in Charpentier's medal for *Duval Janvier*, albeit with a more sophisticated degree of power and mechanisation. This process is significantly more mechanised than is the case with most art medals, which are generally made following the lost wax process.

The lost-wax technique is a labour-intensive method of production, but if the artist oversees the process it affords complete control over the outcome. A pattern may be made in plaster, clay or wax before having a mould taken from it. This is used to create a wax positive which can be fettled by hand with ease, to remove any seam marks left over from the casting process, or to have the detail refreshed and repricked, any marks being preserved in the final bronze cast. The last stage of the process is to encase the wax in a mould called an

investment. This is made from a refractory medium and is fired in a kiln. The firing removes the residual water from the mould, and melts all of the wax out of the investment to leave hollows that can be filled with molten bronze.

In the Renaissance, the process was often even more direct: first a wax master-pattern would be cast into lead and then hand-finished; and this was then used to make direct impressions in casting sand that could be filled with bronze. Either by following the lost-wax process or the sand-cast process, the finished work preserves an indexical relation to the artist's own hand, because each stage proceeds by physical contact, receiving its impression from the step before. By contrast striking is a much more disarticulated and distanced process: once the pattern has been made, it must be tooled into a hard die that is then used to impress the bronze flans that become the medal in exactly the same way as coins are produced. In the case of thicker objects, such as Pilkington's *Jumping Jack*, obverse and reverse are impressed separately and then joined together at their rim. Although from the Classical period to the early Renaissance some artists worked directly in the necessarily hard materials for striking – Cellini was especially proud of his ability in this respect (Hill 1920:25-27) – this process was more normally carried out by a specialist craftsperson, a die-cutter, who translated the artist's pattern into its negative form.

Unless the artist cuts the die themself, this method of facture severs any indexical (direct and physical) bond the object might have to the artist's hand; and even when the artist does make the die, the process normally involves interpreting a pattern modelled in relief, and remaking it through the use of punches in concave form, a two-staged and rather laborious process. Once the die is made, however, the process of striking is markedly more efficient: thousands of medals can be struck; as the most significant cost is in the initial tooling of the dies, the unit cost of production falls sharply as the edition grows. As Mark Jones observes, 'multiples create unease in a public used to the idea of the work of art as unique expression of the artist's feelings' (Jones 1986:16). This is all the more true in the case of struck work because its products are so distant from the artist's hand, and this loss is apparently reinforced by the economics of relative mass-production. The modern method of die production,

the process followed in Pilkington's work, is a mechanical transliteration of the artist's pattern. She made a plaster original, which was scanned, and then milled into hard tool-steel to form the die.

All of this, of course, follows the logic that we have seen in the discussion of Charpentier's work, in which striking is used as a technique because it is mechanical and because it is associated, by the artist, with factual or direct representation; by contrast casting is used because it offers a more fluid continuity with the artist and an ideal of potential associated with this. We see the same distinction in Hill's writing about the 'intelligent hand', and the distinction that he draws between 'knowledge' and 'culture'. As a contemporary artist working after the readymade, Pilkington works in an environment in which these choices no longer seem natural; instead they are cultural positions. By choosing to have her medal struck and then hand painting part of the edition, Pilkington draws the expectations for mechanical production and hand-craftedness into the same frame. This work combines the two modalities of engagement that we can see in Charpentier's work: the staged and manufactured on the one hand, and the direct and expressive on the other.

This approach is symptomatic of the cultural awkwardness that she has cultivated throughout her work. One example of this is her sculpture *Majolica* (2007, **figure 24**). This ornamental concretion of doll-like forms appears to have been made following the highly-skilled and traditional ceramic method that gives the work its title. Majolica or maiolica is a form of tin-glazed lusterware that was produced in Spain in the 15th century, and then from the 16th century in Italy. In the late 18th and 19th centuries, Italian Renaissance maiolica was collected extensively by British institutions and enthusiasts, at which time it was known, somewhat grandly, as 'Raffaelle ware'; modern majolica, with a 'j', was produced for a larger market by manufacturers of tin-glazed earthenware from the mid-19th century onwards (V&A 2017:unpaginated). Thus, the 'i' in majolica operates as a sign of age and provenance, a designation of cultural lustre. Pilkington's *Majolica* looks like an overblown Baroque tablepiece. It has the characteristic blue and white colouring, and the same slight 'run' of colour. But despite appearances, it is a combination of found-objects, discarded dolls and

ceramic material, coated in a dissimulating layer of blue and white gloss builders' paint: very much 'j'-ware.

The sculpture is a real engagement with materials, and also a parodic idea of that engagement, like a Savile Row suit that has been cut from terry towelling. It translates the appearance of craft discipline into a burlesque, in a similar move to Shrigley's lampoon of the stricture and discipline of the life-room; at the same time, presented as an artwork, it also serves to diminish fine art's claims to any larger significance. In other words, the joke works both ways. It draws equivalence between the fraudulent bodging that created the work, and the skilled ceramic process that it emulates. But, by the same token, its success as a sculpture is entirely dependent on appearing to be the product of a refined craft process. Both cultures end up appearing somewhat stupid.

This attitude of inverted expectations, cultural ambiguity and satire is the dominant feature of her early work, characterising her first two solo-shows at Marlborough Fine Art, *White Elephant* (2007) and *Peaceable Kingdom* (2010). During this period, many of Pilkington's sculptures combine a rather loose, almost faecal handling with passages of deft precision, as if to remind the viewer of the base source of their captivation (*Flopsy* 2009). Other objects re-imagine and satirise totemic artists: Barbara Hepworth in her studio as a rather saucer-eyed duck-headed lunatic (*Babs* 2010); or Degas as Pygmalion, his animate doll more finely presented than Frankenstein's monster, but with an evident bolt issuing from her lower spine nonetheless (*Degas Doll* 2010). In these shows, the intelligent hand is both celebrated and mocked, as the title of her exhibition at the Museum of Childhood in London in 2012 makes plain. This show featured a number of realistic chimps in a tableau cast somewhere between Christ's last supper and a glum toddler's birthday party. The show was called *The Value of the Paw*. Pilkington's confusion of cultural registers allows her to define her own authorial space, resisting the binary choice otherwise offered by the intellectual anticipation of fine art and the physical encounter of craft (Carpenter 2012b:29-39). In this way, Pilkington is typical of a number of artists drawn to the ambiguous form of the medal for whom the claims of mental priority in fine art are a limitation, and who regard the hand as a

thinking organ. Until recently, however, her work has been hedged with self-mockery, as though she remains uncertain of her position.

The hand and hand-craftedness is an idea in Pilkington's work, and, of course, it also a real part of her method. In her medallic work, however, the hand takes on an additional importance, because medals are held in the viewer's hand. *Jumping Jack* is mounted on a ribbon, by which it can be grasped and spun (**figure 25**). Fattorini have a long history of making awards and badges of various sorts, including military honours. These are mounted on fine 'military' ribbon of the sort that Pilkington chose for this piece. As is typical for her work, there is an element of satire in its reference to the public honour. The object moves from the adult world of authority to the childhood world of play, and there is a hint of sadism about Jack the citizen performing on demand. The local colouring of the hand-painted edition and the slightly antique appearance of Jack's head recall the cruel visual language of the Victorian *Happy Families* card game, made by the Jaques company (**figure 26**): there is something both playful and nasty about this work. Not only is his expression curiously blank, the splayed and dismembered representation on the reverse, and the vulnerable detail of little Jack's genitalia so evidently on display and apparently separable from his body, draws into close proximity ideas of animation and the destructive over-handling of a toy too vigorously played with.

This touches on another theme that has emerged in Pilkington's work, the seeds of which can be seen in *Degas Doll*, and which have been developed in more recent work such as the *Photo* (2013) and *Fresco* (2013) both of which were displayed in *thing-soul* at Marlborough Fine Art in 2014. These pieces address the animating regard of the viewer: they are like blank screens that only come to life when regarded. The title of this show is drawn from the text of Rainer Maria Rilke's essay *Dolls* ([1913]2012) in which the sculpturally minded poet describes the liveliness with which a child bequeaths its play-things, and – once they are cast aside – their death. Rilke's text is a poetic premonition of the ground-breaking studies of irrational affectivity in visual culture by David Freedberg ([1989]1991) and W.J.T Mitchell (2005), surveys that describe the irrational uses to which figurative images are put, and their ambiguous

animation under the viewer's gaze. In *Jumping Jack*, the hand is exploited as a means of developing ideas of authorship that belong neither to craft nor art; but the hand plays another role as well, as a source of movement, transmission and engagement. The medal seems to the beholder as much like an amulet as a public honour, a liminal object that appeals to and relies upon malignant playfulness for its life. This idea is more explicit in the related works that she made around the same time, such as *Amulet (1)* (2011, **figure 27**). It is an ambiguity that exploits the dual nature of the hand, as a site of reception and expression, and as an organ for negotiating self and other. This haptic capacity is more pronounced in the work of Felicity Powell.

3.3.2 Felicity Powell and Chloe Shaw

Felicity Powell died in 2015 at the age of 53. She was introduced to the medal when she was teaching sculpture at Falmouth College of Arts in 1996, when her students were invited to participate in a BAMS competition. Unlike Dutton, who is a committed evangelist for the form, Powell was 'always faintly sceptical about and amused by the curious combination of people drawn together by medals' (M. Jones 2015:54). Nevertheless, Powell was active in the BAMS council and produced a number of notable medals for the Victoria and Albert Museum before undertaking the curation of *Medals of Dishonour* with Philip Attwood at the British Museum, a significant exhibition that ran for several months in 2009. Medals were commissioned for this exhibition from sixteen leading artists including Cornelia Parker, Grayson Perry, William Kentridge, Steve Bell, and Jake and Dinos Chapman (Attwood and Powell 2009).

Her exhibition *Charmed Life: the Solace of Objects* held at the Wellcome Trust in 2011 formed a response to the Edwardian folklorist Edward Lovett's vast collection of charms and amulets, a large number of which Lovett sold to Henry Wellcome, the pharmaceutical pioneer, museum's founder and principal benefactor. This collection of charms was displayed alongside Powell's own medallic objects, many of which are modelled in wax on slate mirror-back, a traditional support for medallic work.

An installation in this exhibition called *Sleight of Hand* presented a series of videos made using a variety of stop-motion animation and temporally reversed or speeded-up videos of Powell's making-practice (**figures 28, 29**). In some, images of hands emerge from coral; in others, her own hands rapidly construct wax reliefs of other smaller hands, gathered in small shoals. By reversing the timeline, in the same way as a film of a spilled cup of coffee might appear to organise itself back into the vessel if the film is played backwards, as through the agency of an apparently magical technical efficacy, in other sequences Powell's fingers wipe across smears of wax, leaving perfectly formed hands in their wake. The wax medals displayed adjacent to the installation showed the same merging of human and animal forms, thematising the continuity between artist and medium: wax does not dry the skin, unlike clay or plaster, or become friable through overuse. Instead, it merges with the naturally oily surface of the artist's hand in such a way the substance becomes a continuation of the maker's self, an extension of the artist's mental and bodily ecology (**figure 30** and next page). Anyone who has handled wax, even the somewhat 'short' and crumbly sort from which cheap candles are made, will be familiar with its affinity for the hand. A warm ball of wax will retain a residue of touch. It presents a surface that is perfectly receptive to fingerprints, and that deposits a waxy sheen on the finger itself. The extended self-hood of the artist is echoed in the intimacy of the Lovett amulets on display, many of which bore the signs of long use and many years of intimate handling.

The observations about touch and wax are evident from Powell's own videos; but this directly connects to my own experience of working in this medium. In bronze casting, wax patterns are made for investment as part of the lost wax process, and – of all of the materials that a sculptor works with – wax, especially when it is warm so that it can be easily worked, has an apparently seamless affinity not only with the fingertips, but also with the inside of the artists' body. Most of the senses are located through particular organs: sight through the eyes; hearing though the ears; taste and smell through the mouth

Felicity Powell, *Bees*, 2009

Note: This image has been removed as the copyright is owned by another individual or organisation

and nose. But touch is a capacity that covers the whole body and which extends to the innards; and every person is aware, in a tactile manner, of the weight and working of their bodies. For this reason, working with warm wax feels like an extension of the self in a way that is more intimate, uncanny and pleasurable than working with other materials. We can see this thematised in other artists' works, and most interestingly in the example of the anatomical sculptor Anna Morandi.

Anna Morandi was active in Italy in the late 18th century (**figure 31**). She made many anatomical sculptures in wax of the kind collected by Henry Wellcome, and displayed in the Wellcome Museum in the show *Exquisite Bodies* (2009), a display of medical art. In a paper on Morandi's work, the art historian Rose Marie San Juan describes exactly this imbrication of object and self through the mechanism of touch. San Juan focuses particularly on Morandi's wax sculptures of hands, feeling and caressing. The hand is, of course, the privileged site of palpation; and as a motile part of the body, it is where our touch is directed; but touch is a pervasive sense, and for this reason, the hand is representative of the body as a whole, a synecdoche, in a way that an ear or a nose are not. In Morandi's work the hand is a two-fold site of outward direction

(making) and inward reflection (feeling); this binary function is mirrored in the ability of the hand to be understood as both of the body and apart from the body (2011:433-447). What Morandi's work presents to the viewer is the *transformational* nature of touch, rather than, as one might expect from an anatomist, the static presentation of known facts, splayed open, fixed and made visible.

This synecdochic potential of the hand can be seen also in Powell's videos and wax reliefs. Her two flesh-and-blood 'making' hands author her work, and represent her effectively as an artist. The smaller wax hands that somehow flow from her fingertips have a sense of being complete sentient individuals, in the same way as Morandi's wax hands seem also to be alive. Powell's reliefs also feature images of heads, and these too represent the living whole. But the same cannot be said of other separated parts of the body; an image of a solitary finger, an upper arm or an ear looks like a remnant or a relic. Such an image implies dismemberment, loss, illness, injury or death. The most important point here is that the hand is both of the body and apart from it: it is the site where sameness and difference are negotiated through touch. As we know from her notebooks, this thought is intentionally represented in Morandi's work (**figure 32**): one hand caressing lush velvet 'flexible to the impression', the other withdrawing from a thorn, 'awoken in disgust and horror' (Morandi in San Juan 2011:439-440). In Powell's work this melding of self and other is shown as hands and heads sprout from coral, turn into clouds, water and fish.

Wax is the ideal vehicle for transformational touch. It has been used in the production of votive offerings for millennia; this remains the practice today, evident in churches around the Mediterranean Basin, in which modelled representations of afflicted organs are positioned around altars and devotional images in the hope of healing. In his short study of votives, the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman describes the efficiency of wax as a 'material of desire' (2007:9):

> It is polyvalent, reproducible, and metamorphic, exactly *like the symptoms* it is charged with representing, on the one hand, and warding off, on the other. Now, in this constant metamorphosis,

> it ceaselessly affirms its indestructible reference to what all this has in common: one might say it permits a *gain of flesh*, this flesh for which it substitutes and which makes it subsist: through imitation, of course, but also through contagion, since it defines itself as an organic material–a malleable 'flesh' mysteriously issued from the bodies of bees–and since its plasticity comes to it from the 'life' that is conferred on it by the simple warmth of our hands.

The worker in wax experiences this contagion when the substance's perfect balance of resistance and yield, and its equilibrium of temperature, blur and extend the delimitations of the body. The most marked imbrication of inside and outside can be seen in those votives that depict afflictions of the internal organs, those parts of us that we feel but that are hidden from sight; thus when a supplicant 'suffer[s] to the very depths of their lungs or their guts, they will not hesitate to sculpt organic forms of them, half-observed and half-imagined' (13). In the sculpting of felt things, the votive proceeds primarily through the sense of touch, not sight.

A votive is a material image. By this, I mean that it works through a material contiguity with its maker and with the user of the object: it is bound up with the thing it represents, in a way that is a property of touch but not, generally, of sight. This is what we see in Powell's work, when small wax hands spring from fingertips. Wax is the perfect material for making material images. It is an example of what the French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard describes as an 'ideal paste, a perfect synthesis of resistance and malleability, a marvellous equilibrium between accepting forces and refusing forces'; such a paste is a 'primal clay… for keeping and receiving the forms of all things'; but Bachelard goes on to describe the fate of such a paste, which is 'deformed before our eyes' as 'visual images regain their primacy. The eye–that inspector–prevents us from working' (1994:81-82). Our understanding of votive practice, and material practice more generally, has suffered from the primacy of sight: Didi-Huberman describes the efforts of previous historians who have attempted to understand the votive in the context of portraiture, an art of sight and distance (2007:11); in the same way, Morandi's anatomical models have been marginalised because

they do not fit into a rationalised history of medicine which foregrounds the separate and visible and marginalises 'embodied presence' (San Juan 2011:438).

How can Powell be placed in relation to her work in the example of *Charmed Life*? The amulets in Powell's exhibition were collected by Lovett on trips into the working class districts of London, and were purchased from people who, in many cases, believed in their efficacy (Lovett 1909). Lovett was disparaging about the utility of these objects, and wrote about them somewhat sneeringly. When he designed his own *Motor Mascot* (**figures 33, 34**), a charm for automobiles that was produced for commercial sale, this may have been a cynical attempt to profit from the superstitious beliefs of other people. The same cannot be said for the amulet that he made for his own son to wear, when he was conscripted to fight in the First World War. Lovett's act of desperate hope – from someone who was openly sceptical about the efficacy of such objects – is less easy to discount, and is suggestive of a distinctly poignant double consciousness (see J. Hill 2007:65-87). I have been unable to find an image of this amulet, but **figure 35** shows a *Black Cat* amulet collected by Lovett from a British soldier who fought in the Royal West Surrey Regiment, together with two other First World War charms.

The attitude toward the amulets as Powell laid them out in her exhibition is similarly nuanced. They were arranged on a light-box in the shape of a large horseshoe, at hand-height, not so much as ethnographic data as counterpoints or extensions of the images that were present in her own work. As the literature that was produced for the exhibition explains: 'The imagery and forms that emerge relate directly to other objects shown nearby, as well as to the artist's own medical condition and desire for wellbeing' (Wellcome Collection 2011:online). Powell knew that she was ill when she was working on the show, and her interest in medico-magical charms has to be understood in this context. The exhibition presented a continuity, from the videos of her own making process, in wax, which thematise a continuity of things, from the human to the non-human, the internal to the external, to her static medal-like works on slate, to the evidence of richly handled amulets that had been gathered by Lovett. More than anything else, this exhibition spoke about the way that objects such

as these amulets become intimate with their users. As they are handled, they 'warm', figuratively like wax, and merge with the supplicant's self. This is what is really transformational about touch – it merges and defines the self and the other. It is the site where mimesis and alterity meet.

Physical contact often leaves an indexical trace, a mark. A fingerprint is an index of touching; the signs of wear on an amulet are the traces that show an object has been held. The index has a special place in the appreciation of art: the term the 'artist's hand' refers to the distinctive traits of making that the connoisseurs looked for in their search for secure attribution. Similarly, in day-to-day practice, the 'hand' is used to mean a person's distinctive manner of writing, the signature gestures that are unique to each of us, a cultural fingerprint.

In 2002, Powell was commissioned to make a medal that would commemorate a long-serving member of the Victoria and Albert Museum's curatorial staff. This object, the *John Charles Robinson Medal* used a sample of the curator's writing to serve the place of his portrait (**figure 36**). She writes (2006:124):

> I chose to portray Robinson on the medal not by a likeness... but with his own handwriting. 'Now is the time', he wrote in a letter to the museum from Spain. His hand was urgent and these words were reinforced with an imperative stroke to underline the message. That moment was still as fresh as wet ink...

The same idea is given a rather more morbid resonance in the final contemporary example, the medal *This Living Hand*, made by Chloe Shaw in 2011.

Chloe Shaw was born in 1986, and studied at Falmouth College of Arts. She was selected for the BAMS New Medallist scheme in 2008, and her work is presented in the book of that name (2011). Her medal *This Living Hand* (2011) is quite small, 48mm diameter (**figure 37**). The medal features quotations from Keats' poem of the same name, with the poem's first clause on both faces of the medal: 'This living hand', and its final clause wrapped around the edge: 'I

Chloe Shaw, *This Living Hand*, 2011

hold it towards you' (**figure 38**). Both faces of the medal are covered in thermochromic paint such that when the metal is cool, Keats' handwriting is visible on one side as black text on a white ground, with the other side apparently plain black; whereas, after the medal has been warmed in the viewer's hand, the text on one side disappears, to become visible on the other as black text on a white ground. As the medal absorbs heat from the beholder's hand, Keats' own 'hand', his script, ghosts through the medal, from one side to the other (**figure 39** and above).

Keats' poem was written in 1819, when the tuberculosis that was to kill him had begun to take its grip. The hand of the poem can be understood as the poet's own, in the double sense of handwriting and the hand that holds the pen. The poem itself describes an act of vampyric animation: addressing someone who can be understood either as the poet's lover, or more generally the poet's reader, Keats writes (1819): '…thou wouldst wish thine own heart dry of blood So in my veins red life might stream again.'

These three examples above present different ideas of the hand in medallic work. For Pilkington, this is the hand of the maker, evident in the individual hand-crafting of the final layer of paint in the limited edition of *Jumping Jack*; it is also the hand of the holder, who flicks the medal to make Jack jump; and finally, the medal presents a thought about the cultural value of the hand and

the hand-made. Both Powell and Shaw are more concerned with warming touch, and the way in which objects quicken and draw closer to the individual as they are held. In the *John Charles Robinson Medal* and in *This Living Hand*, this idea is presented in relation to writing; and, as is the case in Keats' poem, here the hand assumes the nature of a sign. Indeed, in all of these cases, there is a relation between the hand as a material thing, either as a warm and living hand or as a hand in practice, hand-craft, and the hand as a conventional or symbolic form. It is not easy to identify the point at which one yields to the other.

In all of these three contemporary cases, the 'hand' has two intimately related values: of making and of meaning, tool and symbol. It is particularly difficult to disentangle these when we consider work that trades on dextrous efficacy. In Pilkington's work, the hand has a value of this sort, but it is an exaggerated sense of play that marks the difference between the natural likenesses achieved in some of her work from the looser handling of other pieces. In other words, there is something coarse about it: in the nature of a cartoon or satirical image, it gives access to meaning too quickly to hold the viewer in a state of enchantment. In Powell's work the modelling is finer and the presentation of the work is such that it stimulates a sense of suspension of disbelief: indeed this impulse sits behind the premise of her show *Charmed Life*. But in medals, it is in older work that these two values, making and meaning, become most embroiled and mutually effective.

3.4 Nicholas Hilliard: Making and Meaning

The *Constantine* that is one of the main objects in this study is remarkably charismatic; much of its beauty stems from the fineness and grace of its late-Gothic design. Its material execution is precise, its composition tightly folded. In his influential essay *The Enchantment of Technology and the Technology of Enchantment*, the British anthropologist Alfred Gell describes a point of incommensurability, a height of technical excellence at which an object has been made so well that, although we can understand that it has been made, and even, perhaps, how it has been made, we cannot imagine ourselves, or anyone else, actually being able to make it. The result is memorably described

as the 'halo effect of technical difficulty' (2010:469). The *Constantine* achieves this feat. Powell's videos achieve this 'halo effect' through the fineness of her modelling and, more so, through the *legerdemain* of playing her videos backwards to disrupt the logic of their making, rendering them more mysterious, more opaque, to understanding. Nevertheless, in relation to bafflement as an aesthetic category, my view is that that the best example of the 'halo effect' in medals is Nicholas Hilliard's portrait of *Elizabeth I* (1589), now in the British Museum (Inv. M.6903). This medal shows just how closely making-value and meaning-value touch (**figure 40** and overleaf).

Nicholas Hilliard, *Elizabeth I*, 1589

This small gold medal, only about 44 millimetres in diameter, is richly and finely textured in a conspicuous display of technical dexterity. The medal shows Queen Elizabeth on the obverse, looking out in three quarter profile in what is remarkably high relief for a medal, surrounded by the epigram: 'DITIOR . IN . TOTO . NON . ALTER . CIRCVLVS . ORBE.', (No other circle in the whole world more rich). The image on the reverse shows a laurel tree on a tiny island, on the shore of which can be read: 'NON . IPSA . PERICVLA . TANGVNT.', (Not even dangers affect it).

The iconographic association between laurel trees and royalty is conventional, but is reinforced by the bush being flanked between the regnal

initials, ‘E.R’, (Elizabeth Regina). This image trades on the imputed ability of laurel trees to avert lightning: it shows a strike of lightning diverted onto a Spanish vessel in the sea behind it, a reference to the sinking of the Spanish Armada in 1588. The object associates the monarch with the tree and island: Albion is Elizabeth herself, whose regency alone averted the danger of continental Catholicism. That is how the imagery works: but if we return to the legend on the obverse, it will be noted that it is ambivalent. What is the rich circle that is being referred to? It is natural to think of the coast of Britain, and England’s identity as a maritime nation, but the image of the island is on the medal’s other side. It could equally be a reference to the circle of the Crown, but, as the numismatist Hill observes, this element is scarcely very evident being almost tucked behind the monarch’s head and largely obscured (1920:158).

It seems far more likely that it is intended to refer to either or both of those elements, while acting, principally, in a self-referential manner: ‘no other circle in the world more rich’ would seem to be an apt description of the portrait itself, this small disc of very finely wrought gold, both materially rich in the residual value of its gold metal, but also, and more impressively so, rich in the precision of its making, the acuteness of its technical difficulty and the finely textured density of its marks. So the meaning of the medal takes two different forms at once: there is the iconography that makes reference to an historical event and imputes a power of national prophylaxis to the monarch; but this is wholly without force without the ‘barbaric splendour’ of the medal’s facture; as Hill observes, ‘the chasing is chiefly responsible for the richness of… effect’ (158).

There is a challenge involved in making an assertion such as that above: it comes without a guarantee. I am describing the effect that the medal has on me, and I am imagining how it may have functioned in the Elizabethan court; in the same way, Hill is describing the impression that the object has made on him, and this is similarly subjective. By contrast, the symbolism of the laurel tree can be looked up or tested with reference to other sources, from which – if one did not already know – it can be learned that laurel is a conventional symbol for victory and is associated with wisdom. Art is extensively written about, perhaps

because it appears to be a vehicle for knowledge, but the nature of this knowledge is not easily conveyed in the readily accessible form of language; and so, an apparently significant material object is a provocation to discourse, which rushes in to fulfil the expectation of stable intelligibility. The first effect of discourse is to prioritise the conventional and nameable: this is the general tendency of iconography, which reads the symbolic content of art and from this constructs a parallel text by which meaning may be disencumbered of its material husk. Thus it is quite feasible, or even to be expected, that one might read an iconographic account of the meaning of Hilliard's medal in relation to the image of the laurel tree in art and literature never to be appraised of the primary driver of the medal's power: its material charisma, achieved by virtue of the compact form of its extraordinary technical competence. This would be to miss the purpose of the medal, as its material power is also its principal message: 'You will obey me - or suffer the consequences'. As Gell observes, in hand-crafted arts of propaganda, an equivalence is drawn between the technical efficacy of the artist and the magical efficacy of the ruler – using the example of Bernini's representation of Louis XIV, he writes (473):

> What Bernini can do to marble (and one does not know quite what or how) Louis XIV can do to you (by means which are equally outside your mental grasp).

This medal by Hilliard makes a similar threat. When we look at a medal such as Hilliard's, or the *Constantine*, or a body of work by an artist like Powell, how can we disentangle its message from its matter? The Hilliard medal shows us that even in the case of medallic work, so frequently conventional or language-like in its representations, it is the efficacy of the object's facture that captivates the spectator, charging the representational elements with their power and giving body to language. This seems to be a much more fundamental imbrication of meaning and making than the cultural relativism offered by Adamson or that is evident in Pilkington's work. It was this realisation that served to change the direction of this research away from using the art medal as a case study in how the cultures of art and craft could be renegotiated

towards a more important question: how we can understand the relation of material and content in artworks?

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the context within which this research is useful. Its original impetus came from practice; and it is in understanding how meaning inheres in material practice that it will be most useful.

As is clear from the mutually imbricated histories of craft and art, these two cultures correlate, albeit loosely, to differences of emphasis. Whereas craft is directed at realising material objects, the practice of art claims no such association: it is a free practice, of sight and mind. Recent histories of making have attempted to find a way out of the marginalisation of craft by adopting some of the fluidity that can be found in the way that fine art self-defines. The contemporary examples given in this chapter show that this can be a liberating move, but also that there are limits to this liberation.

The limits arise because 'escape-hatch thinking' solves the problem of the status of making and material in art by translating them into ideas that can be quoted within a dominant artistic language. This language does not value technical proficiency, only what that proficiency 'means'. For this reason, a study that is directed at the way in which art medals work across the cultures of craft and art would inevitably address craft as a sign rather than as an event; such a study would, therefore, lose sight of the empirical constituent of craft, its most mute but most effective engine: craft as excellence in making. For this reason, in order to approach our question of the relation of material and content in practice, it is necessary to return to the ideas identified in chapter two, and to subject these to a closer and more synthetic reading.

4. Meaning and Content

4.0 Introduction

The second chapter identified two approaches to the interpretation of the medal, a closed, categorising approach, and a more open approach that seeks to draw insight from the relation between the medal and other objects, and which treats the medal as evidence. The closed approach relies on techniques deriving from connoisseurship, iconography and science. However, despite its apparent disinterestedness, numismatic taxonomy is reliant on concepts that impose cultural value judgements. The more modern, open approach uses the concept of agency, and, as will be seen, this also structures investigation in a manner that constructs as much as it reveals.

The previous chapter describes the context that this research has come from and in which it will be useful. It looks at the cultures of art and craft as these have been defined historically, and how they play out in practice now. As chapter three concludes, the constituents of both craft and art have become constellated in diverse shards as empirically defined making processes and abstract philosophy, as well as ideas of both of these extremes, as notions that can be freely quoted. Although this permits more scope for creative practice to be redrawn, this liberty is an acceleration of the abstraction that has been the historical aspiration of fine art since the 16th century. As this project advanced it became clear that a different approach was necessary. For this reason, the decision was taken to focus on one exemplary object, the *Constantine*, the object that had the greatest potential to disrupt current thinking on the subject, and to dig more deeply into how it worked; but before analysis of this object can be approached, it is necessary to determine how this should be done.

This chapter is concerned with questions of method. The division of the field into open and closed approaches is useful, but this move prioritises historical rather than intellectual differences. In fact in relying on approaches drawn from iconography and connoisseurship, numismatic study is a hybrid pursuit, synthesising – as is relatively typical in art history – more than one intellectual

tradition, traditions that are not necessarily philosophically compatible at their core.

This chapter is divided into thirds. The first third considers the problem of meaning, and how interpretation extracts meaning (content) from an object (bounded material). To develop a more purposeful picture than the 'open/closed' polarity, the next third considers three texts in depth, each an iconic statement of methodology of great relevance for numismatic study: Bernard Berenson's *Rudiments in Connoisseurship (A Fragment)* (1902), Irwin Panofsky's *Iconography and Iconology* ([1939]1955), and Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency* (1998). Each of these expresses one of the three principal methods that can be found in the interpretation of medals. It is by looking at these texts that we can determine the most appropriate critical terms for use when studying art medals. The concluding third synthesises ideas from these three texts, and uses the lesson of Walter Benjamin's epistemology to construct a critical approach from which the question can be more purposefully pursued. In this way, the chapter presents a synthetic methodological framework for a more fundamental look at the relationship between material and content in art. Chapters five and six apply this framework to concrete instances in which specific relations of material and content can be understood. One of the main conclusions of this project is that meaning is not given. It is something that is made, and that is made through movement.

4.1 What is Interpretation?

To what end should study be directed? It might be supposed that study is conducted with the aim of disclosing the object of study more clearly for what it 'really' is, what it is 'in itself'. But this is not a straightforward aspiration. If we take the example of a portrait medal, what among its materiality, form, imagery or the viewer's perception of the image should be taken as the discrete property of the object, the quality that makes it that particular thing? And then, how might that particular quality be described to another person in terms that necessarily differ from the quality as it is experienced?

Most analysis, like this thesis, is discursive – it uses language as its means. For this reason, the analysis is necessarily an act of interpretation. Its objects are taken into another form and translated into the terms of the host language. There is a categorical difference between the language of analysis and the nature of the object that is being analysed, and this difference is implicit in the meaning of the verb 'to interpret'. This is the definition given by the Oxford English Dictionary (1993:1399):

> Explain the meaning of (something mysterious or abstruse…)… Obtain significant information from… Give the meaning or explanation of something… act as an interpreter, esp. of a foreign language… Bring out or represent stylistically the meaning of (a creative work, a dramatic role, etc.) according to one's understanding of the creator's ideas.

Interpretation is an active engagement with an object that translates and represents meaning or knowledge derived from the object. It is a form of movement. From the start, the prospect of interpretation is a kind of promise, that there is indeed more in the object that is immediately present, that its meaning or its significance is somehow larger than what it is as a material object, and that enquiry will be repaid. If we hope to understand an object in a fuller manner than is immediately graspable, then we are accepting that the initial impression is inadequate or incomplete, and so movement away from that point is inevitable. The direction of movement is a matter of choice, but it is a choice that shapes meaning. This sense of movement is at the heart of the word: the OED gives its root as deriving from a Sanskrit word '*prath*' meaning to 'spread out', like tealeaves scattered in the bottom of a cup, or a soothsayer splaying the entrails of an animal. The same idea is implicit in derivation of the near synonym 'explanation': to flatten out, to make smooth, to unfold (888). These are physical actions to describe verbal and mental processes.

This chapter is the most abstract part of the thesis as it is concerned with epistemology, but these ideas are developed with the aim of apprehending concrete objects and making sense of them. Gell (1998:13-15) and Panofsky (1955:52) use the same metaphor as a way of domesticating their ideas: art is equated with an image of a friendly face; as Gell writes: 'we approach art

objects… as if they had 'physiognomies' like people' (15). This useful image is taken seriously here, and developed to model the relationship between the viewer of an artwork and the art object. This chapter is concerned with the face of art, and how, from this, a quality of mind is inferred.

4.2 What is Meaning?

This thesis has used the word 'content' as a near synonym for 'meaning' and 'form'. The reason why these two words have been avoided is because they guide the mind down particular avenues of thought, and prefigure the question's answer. Whereas 'content' is information, 'meaning' is wrapped up with a sense of higher purpose. By contrast, 'form' speaks about shape, and although this is a kind of information, other than geometry, it forecloses consideration of abstract concepts. Another problem with 'meaning' is that we think of it is as centred in the mind, whereas 'content' can describe words or marks on a surface as well as the idea that these marks make in the viewer's mind. But this choice of words is a careful prevarication, and we are now at the stage where choices must be made.

The problem stems from there being two competing ideas of 'meaning': mental representation, and physical use.

To begin with mental representation, a conventional sense of 'meaning' is direct representation, a straight-line correspondence between a sign and its referent. A higher level of significance is often also implied. Thus, an early Renaissance engraving might be recognised as a direct representation of a woman standing with one foot on a ball; the higher significance of which is that this woman is Fortuna, a personification of fortune (Alciato 1546:F2r f42). Meaning in the sense of conventionalised representation is the subject of iconography, a critical approach exemplified by Irwin Panofsky's work. Even though the image of the woman might function because of a sensuously intuited and natural similarity to real women, in either case of 'direct' or 'high' meaning, the image of the woman acquires meaning when she becomes an object of thought. Thus, for this kind of meaning, the representation that really matters is mental representation. Meaning comes from or is caused by the

material world, but it must be non-identical with the material world, or it would not be possible to apprehend it as a distinct entity, and it would have no import. Mental representation is a movement of withdrawal from the physical world. Things become signs; signs become ideas.

In anthropology, however, meaning is a matter of physical action and use; as the eminent American anthropologist Clifford Geertz put it in his *Interpretation of Cultures*: 'If you want to know what something means you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not what its anthropologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners do' (1973:5). An influential figure in this line of thinking is the British anthropologist Alfred Gell, who sees abstractions from the material / causal realm as suspicious, and who rejects the idea that art is a form of language (1998:14). Instead, art should be seen as a technology for *doing*. This shift in focus from the aesthetic and philosophical traditions of art history to the causal material realm is hugely significant, and is a line pursued by, among others, the anthropologist of mind Lambros Malafouris (2013) to the point of abstraction; but in Gell's work the 'doing' of meaning is a question of emphasis and is not absolute. Gell's account relies on a concept of the index, a form of physical trace from which meaning can be 'abducted' – inferred in the way that smoke means fire, or a friendly smile indicates a friendly character. An index is not a direct representation but a type of contact, the legibility of which is informed by the reader's pragmatic experience of the world.

The reading in the preceding chapter of Hilliard's medal is a 'Gellsian' analysis: the medal is understood to construct a power relationship between the monarch and her subjects. The medal is a tool of statecraft, and its efficacy derives from the enchantment of its materiality, a physical iconicity. Gell's ideas of doing have a narrative quality that involves memory and inferential logic, both of which are mental representations – (a thought that is suppressed in his account). In other words, the viewer of Hilliard's medal must have a memory of other physical objects and, ideally, some sense of how things are made. Furthermore, in this particular case, meaning is directed by the medal's iconography. Be that as it may, for Gell the meaning of an artwork only emerges

in how it makes people *act* differently. This form of meaning travels towards the physical world. It is sensuous and empirical.

These two concepts of meaning, mental representation and physical use, correlate to two theories of language. The nineteenth century Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure developed the first of these (Saussure 2006:15-20,45-51). He identifies two types of difference. The first is empirical difference, evident, for example, in the essentially distinct objects of nature, such as different chemicals. Here language represents a loss from nature on account of the essential non-identity between sign and referent. The second form of difference is more important. This is of a merely relative nature, such as the negative differences of language, where concepts are defined against each other, and 'this' means 'not that'. To put this in more concrete terms, there is a clear and empirical difference between, say, 'copper' and 'bronze'. This difference can be tested experimentally. By comparison, the distinction between breeds of domestic cat is less clear. A 'Norwegian Forest' and a 'Maine Coon' are both relatively large, longhaired, and affectionate animals, with similar colouring. Whereas the distinction between 'copper' and 'bronze' can be tested, the distinction between these two types of cat is a matter of judgement, and, moreover, it is a judgement that operates over a conventional rather than an empirical difference. What is true for cats is truer still for abstract concepts. Consider the fine differences between the words 'contentment', 'pleasure', 'gladness' and 'delight', all of them imprecise synonyms for the concept of 'happiness' with shades of difference between them. But here there is a gain within language itself, because the difference between its terms - (the operation of 'not that') - creates elaboration and abstraction, and a rich diversity of meaning. Thus, even though some things are decidedly real and can be identified experimentally, meaning is a product of language, and all meaning emerges as a result of negative differences (2006:46):

> …everything in the language system… is NEGATIVE. Everything is based on opposition—albeit *complex* opposition—and on this alone. There is no need for the assimilation of any type of positive element whatever.

So, for example, even though the difference between pure copper and one of its alloys, bronze, is empirical, as soon as these terms are given, a gap has opened up between what the bronze and copper are in themselves and what they are as concepts in language. There is no such experimental approach that can be taken in determining the difference between breeds of cat, and even less so between ideas of pleasure and contentment: here meaning emerges *entirely* as these terms sit in difference to each other, alongside other terms, in 'complex opposition'. This unreal economy of language is detached from empirical reality, and meaning emerges as the representation of difference and not similarity. In this system of language there is little sense of an outside, because the language is developed primarily with reference to itself.

The American logician Charles Sanders Peirce developed the second and contrasting theory of language (1960:129-272). Saussure's system is concerned with antagonistic pairs: nature as opposed to language; one word in language as opposed to another. By contrast, in Peirce's system, signification arises in relation to three terms: the real 'Object'; the understanding of the signifying action, called the 'Interpretant'; and the sign, which he calls 'Representamen'. The central term, the Interpretant, is the meaning that the sign represents in the mind of its readers, the understanding that is reached by looking at the sign. Like Saussure's system, this is also an internal, mind-centred conception of meaning; but Peirce's system is constrained in a way that Saussure's is not, because he sees the sign as being anchored in reality, and this is a crucial distinction. If we return to the image of a woman with her foot on a ball, we can see why. This image is anchored in reality for the reason that the possible form of representation of a woman resting her foot on a ball is constrained by the common morphology of women and the roundness of spheres. These are not matters of language, but sensuous knowledge. This constraint is what allows the Interpretant to be formed, as the viewer needs to be able to infer meaning from signs on the basis of a prior experience of the world. This is not a fixed model – it remains dynamic, but it is not completely unreal and negative in the way that Saussure's system is. And importantly, in this system of language there is an

outside, because the language is developed with reference to its objects, and these are assumed to be real.

The sense of real contact that pervades Peirce's theory is most marked in the concept of the 'Index'. 'An *Index* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object.' (Peirce 1960:143)[3]. He gives examples: a man's rolling gait is an index of him being a sailor; a shadow on a sun-dial is an index of the time of day; a rap on the door is an index that someone is there (160-161). These are all forms of contact in the realm of the sensuous and the real. The idea that Gell takes from Peirce is that an artwork functions as an index, not so much of the reality of its maker as of its maker's intent. In other words, the artwork, in Gell's system, is a material fragment, freighted with the intentional actions of its maker (or the person who commissioned the work) and transported from that person to the viewer.

To summarise: these two systems of language differ in their sense of movement. Meaning can be either mental representation or physical action. The former travels away from the physical, and is an abstraction. The latter travels towards the physical as an aspect of concrete reality and – at the extreme – physical use. Despite his emphasis on material causality, and the more extreme position taken by those who have followed him, in Gell's rethinking of meaning, both senses are invoked. Indeed, although he does not elaborate the thought, it is profitable to think of the two forms of meaning as different directions taken along one single axis, between mind and world. Meaning is fluid. It is what is expressed by - and what is important in - an action. This can be an act of speech, mental representation or physical doing. All of these are interpretations, or, to return to the word's root, a form of spreading out, a movement.

[3] Peirce uses capital letters for all his concepts; although this work follows Peirce's definition of the index, it follows common usage in adopting the miniscule form.

4.3 Meaning: Surfaces

Since 2014 there has been a flurry of interest in cultural surface; as the anthropologist Tim Ingold observes, 'many disciplines in the arts and social sciences are currently redirecting their attention to surfaces, and ways of treating them, as primary conditions for the generation of meaning' (2017:99). In writing about art and design this marks something of a modulation of the general attention given to matter and materiality, a kind of ripple on the surface of that debate. It has yielded book length studies of clothing (Millar and Kettle 2018; Lee 2016), architecture (Böhme 2017), and – the text that precipitated this latest turn – Giuliana Bruno's book on media art (2014). Many of these texts are concerned with surface as a characteristically modern phenomenon on the one hand, and – perhaps in a related way – with surface as being particularly insubstantial, atmospheric, ambiguously material, diaphanous. Neither of these is a particularly fresh observation. Bruno's work begins with a quotation of Titus Lucretius Carus, describing an antique Epicurean philosophy of perception (Lucretius in Bruno 2014:2):

> There exist what we call images of things which as it were peeled off from the surfaces of objects, fly this way and that through the air… I say therefore that likenesses or thin shapes are sent out from the surfaces of things which we must call as it were their films or bark.

Bruno is concerned particularly with projected media images. The characteristic modernity of the projected filmic image was noted as early as 1926 by the Weimar film theorist Siegfried Kracauer in his work *On Berlin's Picture Palaces* ([1926]1987); since 1994 the Internet and the promise of virtual reality has quickened interest in digital skin, whose blue glow, like James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), is the dominant colour of our age, our own 'Blue Flower in the land of technology' (Benjamin 2008a:35; see also 2008e:236; Hansen 1987:203-204).

It is not surprising that the face has received a lot of attention in writing about art, because a lot of art shows faces. But the face is a particular kind of surface, one that is not limited to real human faces, but that is characterised by a special quality of porosity (Deleuze and Guattari 2007:170-172) or – perhaps

more usefully – palpability (Ingold 2017). It is from the surface of an artwork – what Bruno has termed its 'Sur-face' (2014:14) – that everything that is both affective and denotatively or expressively significant about an artwork can be either sensed or inferred.

Bruno in particular prioritises the visual nature of surface: there is little sense of something physical at work behind it, either of the material cost and infrastructure on which our '(im)material' surfaces depend (Lee and Sampson 2018), whether these are fabric (Parikka 2018) or digital screens (Constantin 2018), or of the weight of the support, the implicit or actual head behind the face. Gell uses the same reference as Bruno in his work of 1998, but makes rather different use of it, observing that Lucretius' image of perception is one of growth from within, like the sloughing off of snake or insect skin, or 'the films which calves at their birth cast from the surface of their body' (Lucretius in Gell 1998:105). The point of this is that this skin-like emanation is believed by Lucretius to be physical and so is *felt* more than it is *seen*. This is important to Gell and other anthropologists because it is one instance in which an immaterial similarity is believed to be palpable, and it is evidence, therefore, of a belief in the contiguity of visual similarity and physical contact (this idea can also be found also in Taussig 1993:51, and in Frazer's classic work on magic [1922]1949). In relation to the same image of perception, these two approaches, of Bruno on the one hand, and Gell and more recently Ingold on the other, mark a subtle point of difference between haptic visuality (virtual touch) and palpation (actual touch). The following section is concerned with the face of art, and how this too is felt.

4.3.1 Meaning: Face and the Head

We have seen that Alfred Gell's concept of meaning is quite contrary to the older conception of meaning in the visual arts, one that still holds much sway, namely meaning as conventionalised representation. In the discussion of the woman with her foot on a sphere, the 'natural' representation of similarity gave way to a higher sense of conventional meaning, the woman as a representation of Fortune. This kind of meaning is the purview of iconography, whose

landmark theorist is Irwin Panofsky. Despite the patent difference between the approaches of these two men, which will be dealt with at length later on, it is noteworthy that both of their methodological studies begin with images of friendly greeting: a smiling face in one case, and an acquaintance raising his hat in the other.

In *Art and Agency*, Gell uses the example of 'the human smile, indexing a friendly attitude' (1998:13) to domesticate the idea of non-linguistic inference drawing, based on a pragmatic experience of the world, an example of abductive reasoning. He takes this to be paradigmatic of meaning in the visual arts. In a remarkably similar passage, in the introduction to his methodological milestone *Iconography and Iconology* (1955) Panofsky writes of an acquaintance who greets him by raising his hat. He comments that the emotional tone of the gesture, the disposition of the man, is legible through an empathy born of 'practical experience' (52). This brief section of Panofsky's introduction describes, albeit in different language, a remarkably similar form of pragmatic understanding to that described by Gell. In a short paragraph, we are told (52):

> From the way my acquaintance performs his action I may be able to sense whether he is in a good or bad humour, and whether his feelings toward me are indifferent, friendly or hostile. These psychological nuances will invest the gestures of my acquaintance with a further meaning which we shall call expressional. It differs from the factual one in that it is apprehended, not by simple identification, but by "empathy."

Panofsky describes the movements of the man's body, and considers how these are invested with attitude: but our attention is then directed away from the man himself, to his hat, the most culturally coded aspect of his appearance, and in particular to the 'significance of the gentleman's action' – its meaning – as a conventionalised 'residue of mediaeval chivalry' (53). This move takes the author's focus away from inferential reading based on empathy and back into the realm of language, in other words, an understanding of hat-raising as a symbolic action that means 'hello'. It is significant that the hat is detachable from the head. It is as though the hat issues from the acquaintance like a word

from a mouth, or a spirit from a departed body; and indeed, this is symptomatic of Panofsky's approach to art, and the movement of his epistemology, from the material to the linguistic and the mental, from the material to the immaterial. But I want to concentrate, for a moment, on the coincidence of the two authors' introductory images, of art as a form of greeting, and specifically on the expressive surface of that greeting, and its human-likeness. In particular I want to look at the area of the body that Panofsky's autistic gaze so curiously avoids in his acquaintance: the face.

Gell and Panofsky are not alone in beginning their ruminations with images of art as being somehow human. The art historian Hans Belting has devoted two books to this very human-likeness (2011;1994); the art historian C.S. Jaeger ends the first chapter of his study of charisma in art with a queasy description of John Singer Sargent's painting of *Lady Agnew*, and what he describes as her reciprocated gaze. The author confesses that, through the power of her seductive gaze, he has fallen 'In Love with Lady Agnew' (2012:32). Belting and Jaeger would agree with Gell, or for that matter David Freedberg (1989), that an image that is responded to as though it were a person is not best treated as an aspect of language or thought. What this kind of encounter 'means' first and foremost is a mode of behaviour or engagement, far more significant than any utterance that could be expressed in linguistic terms. Belting and Jaeger are specifically concerned with figurative images, and, unsurprisingly, with faces; and there are different senses in which art is face-like: many icons, medals, paintings, statues and photographs are portraits; many of these have the face as their principal psychological (or at least compositional) focus; others are busts, in which the torso does little more than frame the face. But I do not want to consider the face in such a literal sense; nor do I want to limit the frame of reference to images of faces or images of people, because there is a broader sense within which art can be considered to be face-like. Instead, I want to return to Gell's idea of the abductive inference of agency from a material object, and consider what agency really is in this context. The proposition that is outlined here is that agency is the exercise of intent, a property of mind – ('mind' not being confused with 'brain') – the expressive vehicle of which is the

material surface of the art object – its 'face'. Art is face-like in the sense that its viewers posit depth or personality at work behind the surface, and read the surface for evidence of these inner workings. Most art is not literally thin: paintings generally have several layers of paint, and other surfaces beneath, hidden to immediate sight. This real, physical depth serves a purpose too. It draws attention to itself, it has a mute iconicity, and acts as a frame (or *parergon* in Derrida's sense (1976:36)), that arrests the viewer's attention and intimates the mind at work 'inside', the animating principle somewhere 'underneath' or within a thickening surface; this depth incites palpation, both explicitly, to explore it with ones fingers, but also implicitly, to see its surface not as an envelope that conceals and delimits, but as an object of 'haptic vision' that reveals through its surface its 'substantive composition' (Ingold 2017:102). In this way, the implicit depth of personality has a corollary in the real depth of the art object. This is not an essential quality. Film, for instance, has no depth at all – it is all projected surface. But film has a different kind of frame, the cinema, to call on. For sculptures and for medals, weight matters. It calls attention to itself. Sculptures have the surprising density of a human head.

Up to this point, the question of intent has been considered from the perspective of the onlooker, the person who is smiled at, or at whose presence a hat is raised. A smile expresses an attitude of emotional disposition. It is assumed that this is intentional (and genuine); when an artwork is addressed for meaning, whether that is representational meaning or meaning as use, the onlooker might doubt their understanding, but not that there is understanding to be found. In other words, it is assumed that an artwork is a vehicle for intention; indeed this assumption is the *sine qua non* of art appreciation, for without intention, while there might be an object, it will have the quality of an accident, and not of art. Artists share this assumption. If this were not the case, they would hardly waste their time in making artworks.

4.3.2 Intention

So far we have been concerned with reception. Let us now turn to production. Intention is a form of thought and is a product of mind. Like ideas of

meaning, understanding of intention is subject to different approaches. Each of these conceives of the mind in a different way. One constant, however, is that there is an 'I' behind the action. This 'I' is the person who is aware that they are deliberately performing an action, whether that is an act of speech, or drawing, or greeting. The tradition of philosophy since Descartes has conceived of intention – and mind more generally – as a brain-centred process. It is something that happens without (or outside) the body and wider material world. This constructs an idea of self as mind-centred: 'Cogito ergo sum'. Meaning is deliberately created from intention in an act of conscious will, formed prior to engagement with the world. The fact that we can tell one thing from another tells us also that self and world are non-identical, as discrimination relies on judgements of difference from the perspective of a separate viewpoint. Ultimately the vantage of this separate viewpoint is the inner mind.

Over the last fifty years a range of academics from cognitive science, anthropology, archaeology and material culture studies have been critical of the idea that intention happens only inside the brain, and critical also of the idea that the mind is bounded by the brain (Hayles 2017; Ingold 2013; Malafouris 2013; Bennett 2010, and more distantly Gibson [1979]1986:127-143; Bateson [1972]2000). What all these authors share is the proposition that intention is the product of 'extended mind', in which the formation of thought is an active interaction between the body and the material world. The classic illustration of this idea of extended mind comes from the anthropologist Gregory Bateson, who imagines a blind man walking with a stick ([1972]2000:318):

> Where does the blind man's self begin? At the tip of the stick? At the handle of the stick? Or at some point halfway up the stick? These questions are nonsense, because the stick is a pathway along which differences are transmitted under transformation, so that to draw a delimiting line across this pathway is to cut off a part of the systemic circuit which determines the blind man's locomotion.

Of course, the point is that the blind-man's stick is part of his mental and bodily ecology. Even though it is neither part of his body nor his brain, the stick

is a tool that helps him to feel and to think, and to form his intentions. For this reason, it should be considered as part of his 'mind', an extended decision-making function that connects his brain, his sense organs, and feedback from the external world.

This idea is followed to an extreme point by some of the New Materialists, for instance Malafouris (2013), who is suspicious of any idea of internal representation of mind. His suspicion has two causes. The first is that nothing correlates to the internal space of representation without being mediated, which is to say that the internal space of representation is inaccessible to study. Ultimately, all we have to prove that there is an 'I' inside the mind is either our own feelings, which may be delusional, or the utterances of another mind, which, in being utterances, are external. For this reason, we should leave the idea of inner mind alone. The second reason is more interesting. Malafouris is interested in archaeological objects, many of which pre-date recorded language. In this case, the methodological problems of assessing internal representation are exacerbated by the distant deaths of the minds that such an approach would postulate, and the concomitant problem that, so distant is this demise, it may be anachronistic to imagine that these early people had minds like ours at all. For these good, pragmatic reasons, Malafouris eschews the notion of internal representation altogether. Nevertheless, the view that intention is an emergent property of engagement promotes the idea that there is no meaning capable of abstraction from the objects of art, but that they are all about interactions in the causal realm, in other words they are objects for *doing*. This would appear to remove self from consideration, because this self would have to be represented, or at least inferable from the object, and this would be to follow the blind man's stick upwards and inwards, to the subject's sense of inner being; Malafouris' whole system is based on movement in the other direction, down the stick and into the world. Whatever the reason for his approach, Malafouris seems to view the human world as a network without terminals, a reticulation of pure externality. By considering only action and its evidence, he loses sight of the actor, and for this reason ends up talking in quite abstract terms about representation, but rather than the representation being

internal or mental, this representation is like an external suspension, a kind of collectively inhabited matrix. This is the exercise of sensuous and externalised contact, a world of contact that is dispersed in such a way that it becomes impossible to aggregate identity around core memory, to construct diachronic self, a self that persists from one moment to the next. There are good reasons why he adopts this position but it is sufficient to say that, for our purposes, we want both the stick and the blind man.

Let us express the idea of intent in more concrete terms. An artist normally begins with an idea, or is given a starting point in the form of a commission. For the sake of illustration, let us imagine that an iron window grille is needed, and so one is commissioned from a blacksmith. The blacksmith's metal, the forge, the anvil and the hammer, are all part of the blacksmith's mental and bodily ecology. The grille, as it is made, is negotiated through this environment. The blacksmith's metal offers resistance to the pattern of intent; but equally, the blacksmith's intention is itself shaped by plastic limits of the metal: the artist who is experienced works with what is possible; only an idiot would knowingly attempt something impossible. For this reason, even if the blacksmith were to make a design – before starting work – of what the grille should look like, this pattern, the prior intention, would already be shaped by their experience of working with hot metal in the past. Intention, in this example, is formed through an extended engagement with other material things. Intention is not, therefore, a property of the inner mind, but a relational property of engagement. This is what is meant by the phrase 'thinking through doing'. It is a picture that I recognise from my own experience of making.

This is not to say that mental rationalisation, thinking without, before, or against doing, has no part to play in the creative process. Artists can work against the grain of material or environmental dictates. A process might be pushed as far as it can be, in a deliberate display of skill, or it might embrace chance or failure, as is the case with Japanese raku pottery, fired with wood and sawdust to create what are sometimes catastrophic accidental effects. In similar vein, Michael Baxandall gives the example of the use of limewood in Renaissance Germany (1980). Lime wood is a material that is prone to

disastrous cracking as it dries, and this can cause the wood to fall apart. The logic of the limewood is to make forms that are quite open, avoiding acute angles, as acutely angled forms are more prone to damage from drying out; but, as Baxandall shows, many sculptors working at the time of the Reformation adopted patterns that embraced the possibility of failure. Whether this was an internalisation of the cultural conditions of the time, in which images that were considered idolatrous were destroyed, or as a way of demonstrating a particular aptitude, remains an open question. What is clear, however, is that the method of working wood, in this example, is formed from close familiarity with its grain; but it also cuts across it.

In these two examples, of the blacksmith and the sculptor, intention is formed through and against the material, an ecology of flow and resistance. Both of these examples belong to an un-fragmented spectrum of ideation in crafted art. Art in the tradition of Duchamp, as we have seen, conceives of thought (and therefore ideation) in an entirely different manner – this is a mental pursuit; in conceptual practice realisation follows thinking. There is a conceptual element of this nature in most artwork. To return to the example of the iron grille, this might have been made with decorative elements, such as fleur-de-lis cresting, or images of snarling salamanders with curved and pointed tails. These are images that have an iconographic meaning: as this lizard has an imputed ability to resist flames, the salamander might conceptualise the grille's resistance to fire; the fleur-de-lis could be an image of French national identity, invoking an idea of armed security and order. Like the iconography on Hilliard's medal of *Queen Elizabeth*, this relates to the facture and use-value of the object, but it is not content that can be understood as emerging through material negotiation. That is not to say that the use of a lizard on this grille is an original expression of its artist's mind; in fact it is conventional, and that is why it is interpretable, but it is an association that existed prior to its material realisation and that is not part of its material ecology of facture.

In the same way as it is unhelpful to view the two conceptions of meaning, representation and use, as antagonistic, it is equally unhelpful to think of intention as either all material or all conceptual. The choice between having a

body or a mind is not one that we have to make, or that we have the power to make: as humans we have to have both. Instead, we can place the Cartesian conception of mind as a brain-centred process at one end of an axis, and the conception of Malafouris and the other New Materialists, in which intention emerges thorough action, at the other end. The former is a movement of difference and abstraction, and the latter is a movement of similarity.

It is appropriate that Gell and Panofsky begin their methodological studies with images of friendly greeting. A face is an apt metaphor for the legible surface of art's material substrate. It is from this that we infer intent and expressive disposition; but from that physical contiguity we also infer an essential identity, an interior personality that is preserved in the flow of changing life. It is the human ability to remember and to abstract that enables us, when we meet people, to infer a friendly disposition from a smile. The everyday practice of drawing inferences from the facial expressions of other people is a pragmatic mediation of internal, mental states and external experience. When thinking about visual art, especially visual art that is somehow life-like, we need to find the critical tools that can accommodate this connection. This idea will be dealt with in more detail in relation to Berenson's text and the method of connoisseurship, but, in brief, when we recognise a painting as 'a Botticelli' we read a diachronic sense of identity from the surface of a contingent and synchronic event. This is an effect of the 'flesh' of art, its depth: the artwork's 'Botticelliness' is somehow inside each individual Botticelli painting; in depending on our own memory, it is also inside us. It is our bodies that give us access to the physical contiguity of the index, and in interacting with indexical objects, we feel close both to the bodily person as much as to our idea of the 'essential' person. It brings the two together.

To summarise: mind and personality are inferred from the thin material surfaces that we can see when we look at an art object. The conventional view of mind is that it is formed prior to material; a more recent view would reverse this relationship; but this is not a choice that has to be made. The exercise of intention draws a surface across material: this is the face of art.

4.4 Writing: Mimesis and Alterity

A history of art is a history of a class of physical objects. How we understand intention in relation to these objects was the subject of the previous section. But the history of art has a body of its own, a corpus of published text and writing. This body addresses the physical objects of art. There is a clear relation between them, a relation that has a certain degree of porosity. But they cannot be collapsed into one body because just as much as an object of observation must be graspable, it must also be distinct from the observer. Expressed more simply: art history and art are not the same thing. In translation, some mute and inassimilable territory is left behind, as a marker of its difference. As has been seen, for Saussure, this difference is a loss from nature, an inevitable movement of difference and abstraction. For Peirce, however, although the act of interpretation – the signification as it forms in the mind of the interpreter – is separate from both sign and referent, the gap between representation and reality remains close (if not closed) by virtue of the interpreter's pragmatic experience of the world and the sign's anchor in reality. This is a movement of similarity.

Artworks are iconic in different ways, and – usually in fact – an artwork is iconic in several different ways at once. Hilliard's medal has some conventional symbolic content, such as the laurel tree, a representation of wisdom and victory; but it also has a strong sense of what we might call 'material iconicity', and this is much less like verbal language (following Potts 1996:17-30). Whereas the material iconicity of art is irrational and active, addressing the viewer as one body to another, its symbolic iconicity is already abstracted and is more amenable to conscious thought. Much art history, and in particular much iconography, treats its objects as sign systems at the expense of their materiality. An example of this approach can be seen in Edgar Wind's *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (1958), which describes Renaissance artworks as exercises of Neo-Platonic philosophy. This work is a characteristically non-visual iconographic interpretation of art. Unsurprisingly, in this book there is no sense of what is lost when artworks are taken into language. Like Panofsky, Wind is typical of a generation of art historians for whom the artwork is a form of visual

philosophy; to take an artwork into language is an essential part of their method, the means by which the artwork's philosophical potential is realised. In a curious way, the reader of these works is not aware of this abstraction as a deficiency. To a modern reader *Pagan Mysteries* appears as a rigorous text, a parallel exegesis, a beautiful engine of thought. Its connection with the artworks it describes is ineffable; for Wind, the magic happens in language and in signs.

In his book *Confronting Images*, the art historian Georges Didi-Huberman describes this iconographic method as a process by which the visual and the material are expelled from our understanding of art: it is '*a history of exorcisms*, of safety measures and reasonable distancings' (2005:xxiii). He proposes a quite different approach. In *Confronting Images* the author attempts to describe the materiality of art, and its relation to meaning. This is a doubtful process, circumscribed with necessary loss and approximation. The author uses the example of the pregnant white space in Fra Angelico's small fresco of the *Annunciation* in one of the monk's cells at the former monastery of San Marco in Florence (c.1440-1441) to illustrate the problem of the extra-visible, virtual content of art. This is not Angelico's more famous *Annunciation* in which a column stands between the figures of Gabriel and Mary, but a smaller and sparer representation dominated by an empty white space between the two figures. This space, which is, in positive terms, a big white 'nothing' in the middle of the fresco, is also its principle vehicle of meaning, the space where the elusive nature of the Divine is conveyed, in what is, under Didi-Huberman's analysis, a remarkable spectrum of associations that would have been available to the Dominican for whom the fresco was painted (11- 30); but it cannot be approached directly, because there is nothing nameable there: 'We ought to call it what it is, in all rigor, on this fresco: a very concrete *"whack"* of white' (17). A 'whack' is not a stable concept: it is a physical expanse of material and a smack to the face.

Fra Angelico's white whack says nothing nameable. It is not a sign, and it is not a form of language. It has no conventional meaning, and yet it is full of virtual content. How can the practice of art history extract from the tangible

objects of art the intangible content that art objects convey? Art history is an engine of method; in adopting a method, choices are made, and avenues of interpretation are foreclosed; the choices are forgotten, naturalised. Didi-Huberman argues that this is a process of self-ruination; the answer is for art history to remain aware of its limitations. There is a criticism that the art of the past cannot be approached using terms that post-date it; that, for instance, it is anachronistic to talk about the 'visual' in relation to Mediaeval work. Didi-Huberman responds that the past cannot be interpreted only in its own terms: to do so is to resign oneself to the interpretation being as unavailable as the object is itself to the present; and the attempt is too easily based on a misapprehension of conceptual uniformity, as though ideas that are (nearly) contemporaneous are taken to be sovereign. What he proposes is a different method: a dialectic approach that marries a Saussurian logo-centrism with a mimetic recovery of the past in the terms of the past, so far as these are recoverable (35-39). In this sense, Didi-Huberman exemplifies the bilateral movement that this chapter has described, each way along an axis of abstraction to reality, language to material.

All study involves the mediation of contact and distance. The object of study must remain separate (or it cannot be seen) but it must also be held (or it cannot be seen). Academic research takes its objects into the medium of language, either in the manner of judgement, in which the object is translated into the terms of the language (i.e. Edgar Wind), or in the manner of transformation, in which the language adapts to the object (i.e. Georges Didi-Huberman). This involves two different forms of understanding: judgement and mimesis respectively.

Mimesis is a form of contact, a reaching out towards another object in order to become like it, and, thereby, to understand it. This is how ethnography works. When the scientist lives with the community that is studied, and adopts their pattern of life, the analytical gap is closed. An academic who has conducted fieldwork of this sort is Michael Taussig, for whom replication, mimesis and perception are part of the same broadly similar faculty (1993:19-

32). His work *Mimesis and Alterity* is an ethnographic study of this faculty, 'the nature by which culture produces a second nature' (1993: xiii, 176):

> To exercise the mimetic faculty is to practice an everyday art of appearance, an art that delights and maddens as it cultivates the insoluble paradox of the distinction between essence and appearance…. What is essential to grasp here is the strangely naïve and ultimately perplexing point that appearance is power and that this is a function of the fact that appearance can acquire density and substance… Epistemologies of science bound to the notion that truth always lies behind (mere) appearance sadly miss this otherwise obvious point. Daily life, however, proceeds otherwise.

One example of the movement from appearance to essence in daily life is the identification of a friendly disposition from a smile. When we are smiled at we are touched, not physically, but through a mirroring contact, our faculty of mimesis. Taussig draws heavily on Walter Benjamin's work, in particular on his concept of the optical unconscious, a visualisation that draws the spectator out and into a tactile exchange with the world (1993:19-32,38,39). Indeed, the montaged and repetitive structure of Taussig's book, its long filmic descriptions of encounters, and its descriptions of actual films, recalls in its very structure the distraction and drawing out that Benjamin advocates in his essays *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* (2008a) and *Author as Producer* (2008c). This is strongly revealing of Taussig's ultimate purpose in writing the book, namely, the establishment of a kind of ethnographic mirror to give the West a handle on itself and its constructed reality. Benjamin's work is dealt with later on in this chapter, but he is the most important theorist of the loss that attends the language of judgement as opposed to the recovery and contact of mimesis. It is sufficient to say, at this point, that when Panofsky's attention moves from the friendly emotional disposition of his acquaintance to the conventionalised meaning of hat-raising, 'a residue of mediaeval chivalry', his mimetic faculty has yielded to a faculty of judgment, and the gesture of greeting is fossilised.

Art history represents the legible surface of art in language. The sensuous apprehension of material cannot be taken into language without loss. The more

rigid the language, the greater the loss. There is a natural tendency in language to prioritise the language-like aspects of knowledge, and therefore the language-like aspects of the object of study. But within language, as we have seen, there are choices to be made. Interpretation has been theorised in this chapter as a movement of similarity and difference. Everything within language is represented, and therefore 'different' - but both directions of interpretation remain available. Language can be plastic, metaphorical or mimetic (Didi-Huberman, Taussig, Benjamin); or it can be a rigid matrix into which its objects are abstracted and judged (Wind, Panofsky).

The key ideas from the previous sections, on meaning and interpretation, and this section, language, can all now be positioned on a single axis of movement, inwards and outward. These directions of movement are the up and the down of the blind-man's stick.

Inward < Axis of interpretation > Outward	
Difference / Alterity	Similarity / Mimesis
Meaning as Representation	Meaning as Action
Optic	Haptic
Brain	Hand
Abstraction	Concretion
Language (Judgement < > Transformation)	Material (Order < > Entropy)

4.5 Key Texts in Numismatics

The first third of this chapter has considered the problem of meaning, and how interpretation extracts meaning (content) from an object (bounded material thing). The conclusion of this section is that meaning arises from movement along an axis between alterity and mimesis, representation and action. This research was stimulated by art medals, which – it was felt – embody a particularly pregnant relationship of content and material. This section considers the most useful concepts in numismatic study as the next stage in developing a new synthetic methodology. This chapter isolates three texts that have been instrumental to study of the medal. Each of these addresses the

hermeneutic problem in its own way, and, as will be seen, structures knowledge – what is really considered to be important about an artwork – differently in each case. These three texts are specific attempts to derive meaning from material objects, and are the clearest statements of methodology that are available in numismatics. The first text to which we turn is Bernard Berenson's *Rudiments in Connoisseurship*. Like Panofsky's *Iconography and Iconology*, this text describes one of the principal strands of the closed, numismatic approach to medals. The final text, Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency* is indicative of the more modern, open and academic approach.

4.5.1 Bernard Berenson: *Rudiments in Connoisseurship*

Bernard Berenson's essay *Rudiments in Connoisseurship (A Fragment)* ([1902]1920) is a clear and slightly dogmatic statement of method by the famous connoisseur of Renaissance art, made when he was maturing as a scholar. It is to connoisseurship what Panofsky's *Iconography and Iconology* ([1939]1955) is to its field: it is not the founding text, but it is its clearest statement. Indeed, as connoisseurial judgements are frequently telegraphic in their brevity, and there are few other statements of method among the literature, *Rudiments* could be regarded as more important, for being more unique, than Panofsky's text; the iconographers left a more complete record of their workings, being more disposed to philosophical disquisition. *Rudiments* was first published in 1902, but was written, Berenson tells the reader, 'more than 8 years' previously (1920:vi).

The purpose of connoisseurship is attribution. Its starting point, and its most important feature, is the simple belief that the artwork itself is the main source of data (111). The essay begins by dismissing other sources of information as secondary. Artists' contracts are vague, schematic and 'extremely laconic…' (112). Signatures and dates on artworks are even more suspect, as they are so frequently the target of forgery; even when graphology affirms autography, this does not ensure that the remainder of the panel is by the hand of the artist or in a state good enough to be regarded as extant (115). The memory of tradition is even poorer; his opinion of biographical art historians such as Giorgio Vasari

and Giovanni Lomazzo veers between suspicion and contempt. Previous author's propinquity in time and place is the only assurance offered by this source of data, which is to be held in a lower regard than documents of law (116-119). For these reasons, he writes (119-120):

> …the works of art themselves are the only materials of the student of the history of art. All that remains of an event in general history is the account of it in document or tradition; but in art, the work of art itself is the event, and the only adequate source of information about the event, any other information, particularly if of the merely literary kind, being utterly incapable of conveying an idea of the precise nature and value of the event of art.

In a footnote to this section, he makes his position even clearer: the unsuitability of literary information 'arises from the fact that words are incapable of arousing in the reader's mind the precise visual image in the writer's' (119). This is a reasonable statement, but it conceals a further important assumption: a natural identity between an artwork and the viewer's mental image of that artwork. The strength and priority of this connection is the point from which everything follows.

Berenson's connoisseurial method is outlined in detail, but it can be summarised briefly. The first stage in making an attribution is to look for affinities in 'the mere types of faces, the compositions, the groupings, and the general tone' between an unattributed painting and the corpus, so as to establish school, and then, more closely a 'particular following' of the school (122): this produces a list of candidates to one of whom an artwork might possibly be ascribed. The second stage reverses this process, and seeks to 'exclude as candidates for authorship all but two or three of the group we had just now fixed upon' (123), whittling this list down to a mere handful of possible authors by looking for dissimilarity between their securely attributed works and the unattributed artwork. The final stage is a 'return to the search of resemblances between our unknown work and the works of two or three candidates for its authorship, he to be adjudged the author with whose works ours has in common the greatest number of characteristics affording an

intimate revelation of personality.' (123). The process, then, is empirical and deductive.

The best features for examination are neither 'vehicles for expression' nor those that are 'controlled by fashion', but those insignificant details that 'escape imitation and copying' and which follow autographic habit (132-133). For instance, ears are likely to be painted by the master and not by an apprentice, as they are immediately adjacent to the face. They are not expressive organs, and they are more likely as not to be made from habit rather than from direct observation. For this reason, they are excellent as evidence in attribution, being an unconscious form of expression, like an habitual and peculiar letterform in handwriting. By contrast, architecture is very poor for attribution, as it is likely to have been put in by an apprentice, following a pattern (144). Following this method, 'connoisseurship… proceeds, as scientific research always does, by the isolation of the characteristics of the known and their confrontation with the unknown' (123).

In addition to empiricism, the essay reveals – though less clearly – the working of another tradition: the aesthetic. For the majority of the essay, the explicit argument is directed at the formal elements of art, but towards the essay's conclusion it becomes clear that the author is interested not so much in type as character or personality; he writes: 'Rather than ask, "Is this Leonardo's ear or hand?" we should ask, "Is this the ear or hand Leonardo, with his habits of visualisation and execution, would have painted?"' (144). A logical reason for this shift in emphasis is provided: for a major artist there is a risk that he may have been much copied, and so any tests that can be applied here are 'merely aids to the more essential consideration of the question of quality, which question increases, of course, in importance with the importance of the artist' (147). He continues (147-148):

> Indeed, it may be laid down as a principle, that the value of those tests which come nearest to being mechanical is inversely as the greatness of the artist. The greater the artist, the more weight falls on the question of quality in the consideration of a work attributed to him. The Sense of Quality is indubitably the most essential equipment of a would-be connoisseur. It is the

> touchstone of all his laboriously collected documentary and historical evidences of all the possible morphological tests he may be able to bring to bear upon the work of art. But the discussion of Quality belongs to another region than that of science. It is not concerned with the tests of authenticity which have been the object of our present study; it does not fall under the category of demonstrable things. Our task, for the present, has limited itself to the consideration of the formal and more or less measurable elements in pictures with which the Science of connoisseurship must reckon. We have not touched upon the Art of connoisseurship.

This last paragraph is strange and interesting, and must surely not be taken at face value: it is hard to believe that Berenson would recommend limiting the scope of connoisseurship to second- and third- rate artists only, which is one interpretation of the above. But more deeply, in asserting here that 'Quality' is not concerned with 'tests of authenticity', Berenson contradicts much of what has preceded it. There are many statements in the essay prior to this concluding paragraph to indicate, for instance, that 'even in the most applicable test it is the qualitative rather than formal element that gives them their value' (144), or again that 'the ultimate test of the value of any touchstone is *Quality*' (134). And, if we look again at the three-stage scientific test for attribution, it is obvious that the first of these, which considers affinities in the 'general tone' between an artwork and a school, is already an aesthetic judgement of quality. It has to be assumed that contradiction is not his intention, but rather that the author is struggling to reconcile two different traditions of interpretation, the empirical and the aesthetic. In spite of his attempt to make a distinction in the closing section of his essay, these are mutually imbricated in his method, even in the consideration of tiny details. In the final analysis, Berenson can provide no rational account for judgements of quality or artistic character in art, even though these intuitions are involved in his empirical process.

Rudiments explicitly describes an empirical approach to art, and – as we have seen – applies a second tradition, aestheticism, as the unstated engine or arbiter of the first. Berenson inherited the empirical aspects of his craft from the earlier connoisseur Giovanni Morelli, whom he met in 1890 (Brown 1979:33). For Morelli, connoisseurship is neither a craft nor an art, but a

science. Morelli had studied as a doctor in Munich, specialising in comparative anatomy, copying as a student many of the illustrations from Johann Baptist von Spix's manual of comparative anatomy *Cephalogensis* (1815, **figure 41**). When Morelli turned his interest to art, he simply applied the same processes of systematised looking that he had learned as a doctor. The tables with which Morelli's own works are illustrated are comparable to those of von Spix (Bambach 2013:32; Brown 1979:30-40, esp. 33-35, Morelli 1892, **figure 42**). In biological taxonomy as in connoisseurship, the method of identification is for the educated eye to look through an instance in order to derive type. This is an abstraction arising from the perception of a concrete object.

The parallel between biological taxonomy and connoisseurship is close and instructive, but the way in which the attributed type supports identification differs in a crucial regard. Let us consider entomology, the study of insects. Here, the type specimen is the first insect of that kind to be described and pinned to a board or otherwise preserved in a major museum of natural history. In this way the individual dung beetle whose misfortune it was to pique the curiosity of an entomologist becomes the 'type specimen', the ideal against which all other dung beetles of that species are judged: *a* dung beetle is reified to become *the* dung beetle. There are, however, no type specimens of people – (or not anymore, and it is doubted that there was ever a Caucasian type specimen). It would be considered profoundly racist and against the principles of liberal culture to pick one human and hold that person up as the standard for the rest of our species. In any case, to do so would also be to reduce an interest in humanity to its morphology. In the case of both people and their artworks, the interest is their personality. People and artworks both exceed the limits of their morphology in a way that (we typically consider) beetles do not. Named artworks might be pinned to the wall in a major cultural institution, but they never attain the same exemplary fit between abstraction and instance: *a* Botticelli is never *the* Botticelli, and whatever it is about a Botticelli painting that makes it so is the abstract sense of *Botticelliness* that can be apprehended behind the flashes of recognition, like the characteristic gestures, patterns of speech, or smile of a close friend.

If one considers the element of biographical time in relation to beetles and artists, then a further difference, and a higher form of abstraction, becomes clear. Certainly, the entomologist will need examples of all stages of the beetle's life-cycle; especially as they change so radically from nymph (child) to imago (adult). But once the adult form is attained, the imago has assumed a stable state. The entomologist could not, however, use a nymph as the type-specimen for an adult. In connoisseurship, however, this is precisely what happens, as different works by Botticelli (in this case), from his apprenticeship to his later career, will share a quality of *Botticelliness*, the unchanging essence of his artistic personality, his diachronic identity.

This is why Berenson's method appears to be so circular and weak: the ultimate arbiter of truth is the flash of recognition of enduring personality that can be found in the morphological detail of a specific event, but it is from the event itself that the personality is first inferred. Something is clearly missing in Berenson's account, but it does appear, however, to be completely honest: when he is unable to rationalise his method, he simply stops, as he acknowledges in the very last sentence of his essay: 'We have not touched upon the Art of connoisseurship' (148). As will be seen in a later section, his concept of 'Quality', the touchstone for personality in art, and in particular its relation to what is indexical in the 'event' of the art work, provides the groundwork for a more systematic understanding of how a diachronic personality can be inferred from the evidence of its synchronic instantiation, even though Berenson and the other connoisseurs can provide no account for how the process actually works.

Their critics have preyed upon their silence in this matter. The iconographer Edgar Wind provides a somewhat disparaging *Critique of Connoisseurship* in a Reith Lecture that was broadcast by the BBC on the 27th November 1960 (Wind 2016). He can see that their work is effective – the connoisseurs were remarkably adept at attributing artworks to authors and did much valuable service – but he remains wary of the opaque workings of its 'magic rod' (2), citing an earlier art historian's critique of Morelli's practice as charlatanage: intuition masquerading as science (3). Unlike Morelli, Berenson acknowledges

his debt to response, an aesthetic openness to work that stems from the tradition of aestheticism that he encountered during his extended stay at Oxford, and in particular the example of the English essayist and critic Walter Pater whom he eventually met (Brown 1979:36-39). The heightened awareness that Berenson draws from the aesthetic tradition is employed in the connection of quality and personality, the most metaphysical aspect of the practice of connoisseurship. Quality is the ultimate evidence of authenticity, and it is the hand's quality that gives access to the mind. There is a supposed correspondence between mind and material, and for Berenson this has an indexical nature. Berenson provides no theoretical definition or structure for the index in his work, but it is absolutely central to his method. Before concluding this section, it is important to list the different ways in which indexes are employed in his method, and the method of the other connoisseurs.

Rudiments begins by dismissing textual sources of information. Without using this language, ('index' is not a word in Berenson's vocabulary), these are dismissed as not being indexical. Words cannot convey to the mind the fitting contiguity of images. By contrast, there is a perfect passage between a picture and the mental image of the picture, and likewise between the artist's personality and the picture, as this is mediated by the artist's hand. The indexical chain in connoisseurship can be written thus:

Viewer > Mental image <> Picture <> Hand <> Personality < Artist

In some writing on connoisseurship, the ability to see through an artwork to discern the personality behind it is construed as a gift, but one that must be cultivated. For instance, the numismatist Stephen K. Scher has written (1993:3):

> The confident and secure acquisition of any work of art of fine quality requires at least two essential elements: a considerable fund of knowledge acquired through study and experience, and the practically indefinable instinct for quality and authenticity, sometimes defined as 'having an eye', with which the consistently successful collector is naturally endowed.

Experience and study clearly involves exposure to the objects of art and an ability to remember them; but the issue of the 'naturally endowed' eye is more

problematic. In her recent book on the eighteenth century connoisseur Pierre-Jean Mariette, Kristel Smentek describes in useful detail the process by which such an eye can indeed be acquired (2014:6,94-138). Mariette – like many subsequent connoisseurs – emphasised the signature nature of manual and mental habits, in the same way as Berenson advises his readers to look at the ears for tell-tale autographic signs. As Smentek describes, Mariette and his circle of colleagues engaged in structured drawing exercises, copying from artists' drawings in order to develop their capacity to look. Visual ability is acquired by virtue of the connoisseur's own hand as it transcribes the image of a drawing: in this way, the learning is both visual and proprioceptive, a physical performance of the index as it is committed to memory, a bodily committal of the visual, as Mariette himself describes (Mariette in Smentek 2014:115):

> One is born, they say, with taste and sentiment and that one needs nothing more to judge any work of the mind. I do not agree at all. Taste and sentiment are indispensably necessary to judge well, but one must add many other kinds of knowledge which can only be acquired by long experience and which are principally conferred by some practice in art making.

This relationship is a perfectly logical reversal of the foundational assumption of all artistic appreciation of this kind, which – as we have seen – takes it for granted that personality or mind can be read from the evidence of an artist's hand. The process is simply reversed: instead of throwing out, the hand takes in. In much connoisseurial writing, artists' drawings are prioritised for another reason: following Vasari's concept of *disegno*, it is assumed that they are already conceptual. This assumption can be found as late as 1991, in Alexander Perrig's study of Michelangelo's drawings: '… a drawing is not a bone displayed for veneration. It embodies a piece of the imaginative world of its creator. It makes visible the intimate mental spheres otherwise closed to all biographers' (9). Perrig's study is notable for another reason: it is remarkably late example of a work of connoisseurship that describes itself as scientific.

Later connoisseurs used photographs rather than drawings. In the 1880s Berenson described the perfect indexicality of this medium: 'leaving out the colour, they are the pictures themselves' (in Brown 1979:47). In a similar way,

the numismatist George Hill used photographs as an aid to study, but thought that these were more 'truthful' if they were taken from casts of medals rather than an original medal, because the cast has a uniform surface colour and so a photograph duplicates the morphology of the form without superficial distraction (1930:vii). In both of these examples, the photograph creates images that function as drawings, becoming more conceptual once monochrome. In his *Sketch for a Self-Portrait*, Berenson regrets that he had not made better use of photographs, writing that (1949:49-50):

> …on the pretext of having to see certain works of art and to see them where they grow, I make costly tours and give them time that in deepest conscience I suspect of being unnecessary. For the task in hand, the time could have been better spent in the library, with books and photographs.

This quotation is remarkably evocative of Walter Benjamin's description of the cultic element in artistic appreciation, which he seeks to explode in his famous essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility* (2008a), and takes us to the most important idea of indexicality in connoisseurship: the idea of the tough fragment.

It is fundamental to the method of connoisseurship that it is directed at the small details, the most unconscious elements of autography where the artist gives themself away. In his *Critique*, Edgar Wind enlarges on this tendency, which he takes to be perverse. The connoisseur seeks the (Wind 2016:5):

> …authentic *touch* which he seeks to feel and for which the name is merely an index. For Morelli, the spirit of an artist resides in his hand; and if another hand is superimposed on his work, it means that the spirit has been obscured…. An intensely romantic view of art is implied by this method. Whether intentionally or not, Morelli leaves one with the perplexing impression that a great work of art must be as tough as it is fragile. While the slightest fading or retouching or over-cleaning of a detail seems to throw the whole picture out of balance, yet through the distortion by coarse restorers and by clumsy copyists the aura of the 'lost original' remains so potent that concentration on a genuine fragment is sufficient to evoke it. We must remember that Morelli was born in 1816, and that his cult of the fragment as the true signature of the artist is a well-known Romantic heresy.

The notion of tough fragment is implicit in Berenson's method as much as Morelli's: in both authors there is an idea that the authentic detail is sufficient in itself to recall the aura of an almost lost original. In Berenson, this last point can be seen most clearly in his idea that to really appreciate art it must be seen 'where it grows'. There are two registers of time implicit in this construction, the synchronic act of making, which Berenson describes as the 'event of art': the photograph provides a perfectly good index of this, and it is an admirable aid to study. But as art 'grows' in its own location, it also acquires a cultic value, so well described by Benjamin (2008a). This is a longer time of distance and tradition, including actual change, ageing, overwriting, and the acquisition of a patina. In the same way as an observer accrues a naturalised intuition over a lifetime of study, the artwork accrues an embedded tradition that enlarges its authenticity. As this authenticity is challenged by damage or over-painting, the tough fragment of art becomes more powerful. The photograph is no substitute for this: in order to be really *appreciated*, as opposed to *studied*, the artwork must be seen in its historical setting.

To summarise: connoisseurship is concerned with attribution, and therefore with the relationship between artworks and artists. It is empirical and structured, and its stages of looking owe much to a history of objectivity as this developed in the natural sciences. However, in its emphasis on quality, the mind of the connoisseur is connected to the mind of the artist through the medium of the artwork in an intersubjective exchange. In Berenson's account, two traditions can be seen at work: one of these is objective, and is formally accounted for; the other is aesthetic, an openness to response. It is clear that these are related, but the way in which the former is reliant on the latter is not described, and seems to be taken as a matter of faith. The analytical position implicit in Berenson's writing is simultaneously immanent (connected directly to its object) and removed. There is a belief in the identification of morphology and selfhood, in which signification of self emerges through material handling, and then is enlarged by tradition, in the same way as the critic develops through education. This could be thought of as expressing an innate belief in distributed

personhood, clustered around some kind of essential core of self; but connoisseurship has nothing to say about how this process works.

4.5.2 Irwin Panofsky: Iconography and Iconology

Connoisseurship was, and still remains, an important part of numismatic study. Despite being philosophically incompatible at their core, the other major influence on the field is provided by iconography. There are two different English language versions of Irwin Panofksy's *Iconography and Iconology*, the chief statement of the field of study, one published in 1939 and one in 1955; the second of these differs only in making a few matters of nomenclature clearer. It is the last version that is used here. In much the same manner as Berenson's essay, it is a usefully dogmatic assertion of method; but it is totally antithetical to the Berenson text in its conception of meaning as well as in its principal sources of evidence.

Iconography and Iconology is divided into halves. The first is concerned with a general outline of method (51-66), while the second part concentrates on the particularities of Renaissance iconography (67-71). This discussion is concerned with the methodological statement.

From the opening sentence it is clear that iconography follows a radically different vector of analysis from connoisseurship; whereas Berenson's method considered the imbrication of content (conceived of as artistic personality) and material (as the material form in which the hand of the artist is evident), Panofsky writes: 'Iconography is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form' (51), a construction that sees form and content or material and meaning as distinct, with subject matter being the foremost concern.

The essay begins with a description of the strata of labour in which the art historian is engaged. The first layer is to apprehend the object of analysis and to recognise its 'primary or natural subject matter' (53). This 'pre-iconographical description' requires nothing more than 'practical experience' of the world, a familiarity with objects and events towards a basic recognition of the 'factual' and 'expressional... motifs' evident in the object of interpretation (53,66). This is

a process of perception, followed immediately (or, as Panofsky concedes, apparently simultaneously) by recognition. This means, of course, that the shaped material and content of the artwork are in fact in some way fused: but as will become apparent, Panofsky's theory of formal perception is not positivist in the same manner as it is for the connoisseurs.

The second layer of work sorts the primary motifs into carriers of meaning: for instance, in order to recognise a female figure holding a peach as a personification of vivacity, the interpreter needs familiarity with common themes, sources, literature, and other works of art. This stage uses textual and other visual evidence to relate motif to a concept or thing in the manner of meaning as representation. Panofsky calls this second stratum of analysis 'iconography' (54-55).

The first two layers of work are descriptive, and are concerned with correct identification of motif and correlation to denoted meaning, or, to put it more simply, categorisation. The final layer of art historical work is interpretive, and seeks to uncover 'the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion – qualified by one personality and condensed into one work' (55). This intrinsic and higher meaning is uncovered by subjecting the motifs of the artwork to an intuitive and synthetic analysis that brings other 'historical, [or] psychological or critical' method to scrutinise the data uncovered by pre-iconographical and iconographical layers of work. This last and highest layer of interpretation is what Panofsky calls 'iconology' (55-56). Conceived thus, iconography is to iconology what entomology is to ecology, or, for that matter, what numismatics is to academic art history, the handmaid to a higher purpose.

In addition to outlining a method for the derivation for meaning, the essay expresses a mind-world relation without which, Panofsky would argue, meaning is impossible. The full ambition of iconology is conveyed in the lapidary phrase 'the general and essential tendencies of the human mind', understood as an historically situated but supra-conscious expression of the philosophy of the age: 'The meaning thus discovered may be called the intrinsic meaning or

content; it is essential where the two other kinds of meaning, the primary or natural and the secondary or conventional, are phenomenal' (64-65).

The philosophy on which this is based is not immediately inferable from *Iconography and Iconology* but has been usefully summarised by Podro (1982:178-208) and Hatt and Klonk (2006:96-119). The first layer of pre-iconographic work is heavily influenced by a neo-Kantian position derived from Ernst Cassirer (who is cited twice in the essay) who held that we do not grasp objects as they are in themselves, but only as they appear to us by virtue of unchanging mental characteristics that are shared by all people. For this reason all perception, and therefore all art, is an expression of mind, and it follows from this that form is already mental and is capable of carrying symbolic value; it is for this reason that formal perception is not positivist in the manner in which it was for the connoisseurs. This Kantian assumption also makes the final and most ambitious stage of the project possible, iconology. Because art is expressed in a form that is apprehended by universal properties of mind, (the argument goes), it is possible to isolate the subjective expression of drives from those of objective understanding, and thus to see an artwork as an expression of the 'essential tendencies of the human mind' as these are expressed throughout history. For this reason, iconography can claim to have resolved the hermeneutic problem, overcoming the parochial condition of the artwork and the art historian.

The project of iconography as it is evident in this essay can be summarised thus: iconography / iconology is structured and heuristic. It is a philosophical system that interrogates art for evidence of language-like meaning, the highest and most ordered form of which can be characterised as internal aprioristic representation. In this system, meaning is a stable correspondence between image and concept, in the sense of representation – this is covered by the term 'iconography'; but the larger ambition of meaning in Panofsky's 'iconology' is the philosophical *will* that it embodies, this having the quality of causation in Kantian philosophy, as a universal property of mind that orders the phenomenal universe. This is a much more structured and academic essay than Berenson's, but in much the same way, the pragmatic discussion of method is explicit, with

its philosophical assumptions, (or, in Berenson's case, belief system), being left to be inferred by the reader from the small clues that are available. It does, however, have an explicit position of analytical engagement. The stated position of iconography is exterior to the object of analysis. It is open to criticism: in much the same way as the supposed *a priori* reasoning of Kantian philosophy has been criticised for naturalising a gendered and culturally specific viewpoint, Panofsky's work has been criticised for being blind to its equally specific context. The correspondence between Panofsky's system and the neo-platonic philosophy of Renaissance art betokens an unspoken identification between the analyst and object of analysis; in other words, far from being the universal epistemology that it claims to be, iconography is constructed in the image of Renaissance art.

Those, then, are the two key statements of method for the 'closed' school of numismatics, described in chapter 2. Whereas connoisseurship is a practical and intersubjective discipline, relying on the intuitive exercise of deeply sedimented familiarity with its objects, iconography is, at its core, an abstract, philosophical exercise. They are philosophically incompatible, the latter being based on a methodological objectivity, and the former being an immanent pursuit. In practice, numismatists such as Hill would turn to these approaches as required. The dominant text for the later, 'open' approach to medals, that which is adopted by the academic school, is the text to which we now turn.

4.5.3 Alfred Gell: *Art and Agency*

Alfred Gell's highly influential book *Art and Agency* was published posthumously in 1998 one year after Gell's death at the age of 51. It should be considered a first draft, as the rapid deterioration of its author's health as he was working on the final chapter afforded no time for the work to be reviewed (S. Gell in A. Gell 1998: xiv-xv). This is more than a biographical footnote. There are – as we shall see – some signs in the work itself that the ideas could be extended or expressed more rigorously; and of course, had he lived these might very well have been developed considerably further in other works. As it is, *Art and Agency* remains brilliantly provocative. This section considers the book

alongside his earlier essay *The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology*, which was first published in 1992 (Gell 2010:464-481).

The book is explicitly theoretical. This is a marked contrast to *Rudiments*, which stops abruptly at the point where theoretical work is needed, and *Iconography and Iconology*, the theory of which must be inferred from a few lapidary fragments in the essay itself, read alongside other sources. Gell's ideas were developed with reference to a culture that he is not a member of: his fieldwork was conducted in Melanesia; and furthermore, Gell's aspiration is that his theory will be applicable to consideration of all artworks. This is a marked difference to Berenson and Panofsky, both of whom are the direct inheritors of the humanist traditions in which they worked. They are both, and quite willingly, institutionalised. By contrast, Gell rejects any institutional definition for the art object (5) on the very reasonable basis that most of the world's artworks are made with no reference to the institutions that we take for granted in the West. Similarly, Gell does not present any positive or object-orientated definition of what art is: his definition is '*theoretical.* The art object is whatever is inserted into the 'slot' provided for art objects in the system of terms and relations envisaged in the theory…' (1998:7). In essence his theory is that art is a function of the social-relational matrix – what matters is how it *operates*, not what it is, and still less how it strikes the viewer as an object of beauty. This is the most radical aspect of the book.

Doing is theorised as 'agency'. Not only is his theory the most explicit in terms of its presentation, it is also the simplest that has been presented so far. It relies on four terms: the index (which is introduced as a technical term for the artwork), the artist (who is understood as the originator of art works), the recipient (those who are affected by indexes), and the prototype (those who are understood to be represented by the index) (27). The artist is not necessarily the agent. Agency or patiency (receptivity) can be a property of the artist, the index, the prototype, or the recipient, depending on the nature of the exchange. Thus, in the example that he gives of Joshua Reynold's famous painting of Dr Samuel Johnson (c.1772), now in the Tate Gallery, the recipient

(viewer) might respond to the prototype (Dr Johnson) as the inferred primary agent of the index, and not the artist (Reynolds), whom the recipient may abductively infer to be in awe of the prototype (Dr Johnson), and thus in a position of patiency (53). These agential chains are rather messy when presented in prose form, but they diagrammatise very clearly – in this specific case as:

> [[[Prototype-A] → Artist-A] → Index-A] → Recipient-P

Or, more clearly with the names inserted rather than the technical terms:

> [[[Dr Johnson-A] → Reynolds-A] → The painting-A] → The viewer-P

The chain of agency passes from left to right, so every term to the right of – in this case – the Prototype, is in a position of patiency relative to that term to its left, but a position of agency relative to the term to its right, hence the letter 'A' or 'P'.

Having done away with the reference points that we might otherwise use to identify what art is, Gell proposes that 'art-like situations' can be diagnosed from the kind of cognitive operation that they provoke, namely exactly the kind of abductive reasoning that Charles Sanders Peirce associated with his term the 'index'. It is for this reason that the index is adopted as the technical term for artwork in this book. In a passage that is reminiscent of the over-skipping elision of Panofsky's first stage of iconography, Gell cites Peirce's description of the index as a 'natural sign', without considering what is 'natural' about it (13). In other words, Gell identifies the artwork as an 'index' on the basis of the inferential logical that is used to understand it, conflating the identity of the index and its interpretation. In more accurate Peircian terms, Gell's conception corresponds to the 'Interpretant', the understanding of the signifying action, and not the 'Representamen', the sign, whereas in Peirce's system an index is a subclass of 'Representamen'. By failing to realise this error Gell loses sight of the essential *physical* contiguity that is at the heart of Peirce's concept, and, as we shall see, this becomes problematic for his theory as it is elaborated. Gell

runs the two concepts together. In its simplest form, for Gell, the index is the (more or less) material thing that allows the abductive inference of *agency*. Agency – in this part of the book – is defined as the capacity to act in the world.

Not only is there no necessary sense of material contact or contiguity about the index in Gell's use of the term, his theory allows for the elaborate distribution of agency through chains of secondary agents. Indeed, it is not until Gell's considerations of the *Distributed Person* (96-154) that material contiguity, and ideas of contact and contagion are discussed at all, (ideas that we recognise from Frazer's *Golden Bough*, a classic study of magic and religion first published in 1922, and that was so influential to Michael Tausig). Thus a patron might be the primary agent, his agency being distributed through the secondary agency of the artist whom he commissions (51- 65). The distribution of agency is a cornerstone of Gell's theory, and is evident even in the simplest binary relationship of artist-agent to recipient-patient, for it is not the artist who acts directly on the viewer, but the index (art work) to which the artist's agency has been transferred. His theory is based on a fundamental *dis*-continuity. This can be thought of as the passage of energy from one snooker-ball to another. The agency is passed from agent to artwork, specifically to alter the behaviour of the patient, the viewer; they touch, and then they separate.

In one sense, Gell's emphasis on action in the causal material realm is highly empirical as it promises to focus on measurable effects. It is a thoroughgoing and quite useful rejection of the emphasis on signification (6): the claim is that he is utterly unconcerned with ideas of reading. But the emphasis on action is a rather destabilising and potentially abstracting move because it makes the materiality of art rather ambivalent in its status. Does it matter what the object *is*, or only what it *does*?

The earlier analysis of Hilliard's medal of *Queen Elizabeth* followed concepts drawn directly from Gell's own work on meaning and making, *The Technology of Enchantment* (1992). My analysis of the medal depends on Gell's useful concept of the 'halo effect of technical difficulty' (1992:469). We have seen how this is materially specific, and also how difficult it is to disaggregate what is made about the medal from what is iconic about the medal. But in this later work, Gell

adopts the position that it is necessary to focus not so much on what the object is as what it does. For this reason, analytical attention is directed not so much to the thing itself as to the measurable effect of the thing on other people. That is his theoretical position. In practice, we are left in a difficult position, as we now have to somehow gauge that effect.

For some encounters between an index and a patient, that might be possible: for example, the legal requirement to install Emergency Exit signs in cinemas might have a measurable effect on evacuation times and numbers of lives saved. In this example, the evacuees are patients, responding to the agency of the government through the index of that agency, the sign of the stickman fleeing towards an oblong of light. But what about Hilliard's medal, how can we understand this object in terms of its impact on the material-causal realm? If Gell's proposal is followed here, because we have no access to the Elizabethan mind except through the object, (which we are not really supposed to consider), we are obliged to *imagine* the agential efficacy of the medal on other people. For all that he provides a compelling theory of captivation, he does not want the reader to dwell for too long on the material object as such. What option does that leave, other than to imagine the Elizabethan response? Ultimately, it is hard to see how this consideration is not both aesthetic *and* imaginative. The objection is not that the reader of the object must employ their aesthetic or imaginative faculties – these are very useful and are fundamental to most research in the arts; the objection is that Gell's system is theoretically opposed to the use of these faculties even though it leaves the reader in no position other than to use them. The result is this first half of *Art and Agency* presents a clean theoretical picture, but one that cannot be applied unless we turn our backs on this fundamental contradiction. In a way, this problem stems from its universal aspirations – which are, of course, extremely useful in directing us to think differently about our own culture. We could, I suppose, accept that this theoretical work is intended to work in theory, and that it is not expected that any real granular insights will be gained in practice; but this seems to be a weak position to take.

The latter half of the book marks a shift, as ideas of agency as 'doing' are developed into agency as the exercise of intention. As we have seen, it is not possible to theorise intention without also theorising mind, and Gell begins by contrasting two different conceptions. The first is an 'external' model, which draws on Bourdieu's idea of the *habitus*. The idea here is that we develop a sedimentation of past interactions with others, and from that derive an image of how people behave. This enables us to negotiate them as rational beings. The second model is an innate idea of internal representation. This is the assumption (again through imagination) that other people have an internally represented consciousness of their own; whereas the first is algorithmic and rational, the second is empathetic. Gell can see virtue in both models: the first is more 'correct' for a sociologist to assume; but without the second, we would lack the ability to be really impressed by, for instance, other people's forbearance in the face of provocation – this requires that we can imagine their frustration (126-128).

Gell states explicitly in this later section of the book, that agency is the exercise of intention. There is no such thing, for him, as material agency, as material cannot think – (though many of his followers have overlooked this commonsensible reminder). As we have seen, the design-orientated view of intention presupposes a conscious self, prior to the body and to material. For Gell, its existence is almost an article of faith, as he observes that 'The trouble with this mysterious 'I' is not that anybody truly disbelieves in it, but that nothing in the world, no physically identifiable thing, really seems to correspond to it' (130). In the remainder of the book, Gell breaks down the idea that the 'I' of mind is one thing, but rather (drawing heavily on the American philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett) suggests that the mind is an aggregation of 'I's each of which is under the direction of a higher 'I'; mind is, therefore, an internalised network. What follows is Gell's most brilliant conjecture, which he illustrates with reference to Marcel Duchamp's oeuvre. This starts with the simple observation that most artists produce more than one object. Each artwork (or index in his terms) is an expression of the artist's mind at a moment in time, but it sits in a networked relationship with other artworks that the artist

has made. Gell posits an isomorphic identity between the network of artworks that an artist produces and the network of 'I's that sits within a person's mind (222):

> there is *isomorphy of structure* between the cognitive processes we know (from inside) as 'consciousness' and the spatio-temporal structures of distributed objects in the artefactual realm—such as the *oeuvre* of one particular artist… In other words, the structures of art history demonstrate an externalised and collectivised cognitive process.

Gell does not ask how this idea works in the example of an artwork that cannot immediately be located by the viewer as part of a network of other art objects, but it is useful to consider this case here.

Let us imagine that Bernard Berenson encounters a painting by an unknown artist. Following the first stage in Berenson's method, he will form a general impression of the period, place and school, and so position the artwork within a loose network, a constellation perhaps, of other broadly similar objects. The connoisseur will immediately have some inferential basis by which the personality of the object can be approached. In the same way, on being introduced at a college function to someone with whom he is unacquainted, Irwin Panofsky might be offered the stranger's hand. This iconographer will understand the formal attire of the gentleman and the socially conventional nature of his greeting as sufficient information to begin, similarly, to position his new acquaintance within a similar constellation of previous experiences. Both the connoisseur and the iconographer will imaginatively construct for their new artist or their new acquaintance *the likely possibility that they have a personality of their own*. They have only one datum point from which to work, but they will both assume that the encounter is one expression of a broader biography of a real person. This is part of art's 'physiognomic' appeal: like all smiling faces, we know from experience that an artwork is the expression of a personality, and that all personalities, like artistic careers, evolve over time, even while they retain an identifiable core. For this reason we can conjecture that a single object, a single unattributed artwork, can also operate as an instance of distribution. The reason for this is that so much else in our social

experience operates on the same basis. The practice of daily life relies on such conjecture.

By this stage in Gell's book what had been a discussion of the ontology of artworks has become a discussion of the ontology of people. It is inevitable in a book that theorises artworks as vehicles for agency that these terms should converge. This could be seen as symptomatic of a more general theoretical gamble being taken at this time by a number of other authors concerned with the status and function of artworks. The author David Freedberg is widely cited in *Art and Agency*. His own book, *The Power of Images* (1989) was published a few years prior to Gell's *Enchantment* essay (1992); in this book, examples of arousal are piled-up like case-law in pursuit of his never-quite-analysed target: the capacity of artworks to elicit irrational emotional and behavioural responses, to act on our bodies, and to act as though they are people. In W.J.T. Mitchell's study on 'lives and loves of images' (2005), this idea is pursued: the reader is asked to consider what happens if we think of artworks as alive. This spooky proposition may seem irresponsible, but the examples that Mitchell gives of clones and biocybernetic engineering was sufficient in 2005 for the conjecture to be valent (96), since when its vitality has only increased.

It is implicit throughout the latter half of *Art and Agency* that artworks and people are symmetrical objects, as is evident from the emphasis that Gell places on the indexical nature of personality. Gell understands a person as 'the sum total of the indexes which testify, in life and subsequently, to the biographical existence of this or that individual' (222-223). The reader is given two choices: the internalist model, in which the self is associated with abstract thought; and the externalist model, in which the self is associated with objects and interactions that occur beyond the limits of the physical body. This is a choice as, ultimately, what occurs in the heads of other people is necessarily a matter of belief. What neither of these alternatives really accounts for is the importance of the physical and living endurance of the person in the form of the corporeal, biological body. This is a significant oversight, and is perhaps a consequence of undervaluing the materiality of the index. Had the oversight not been made, it may have been possible for Gell to provide a model that could

suture these two systems into an organic whole: what he misses is that these are two sides of the same coin.

I propose that a person's flesh and art's matter are of crucial importance in drawing together the temporarily distributed person, and making it available as an idea and as a material thing. In this way, the flesh holds the person's unique identity, and the art work is a form of technology (in Gell's terms) that enables the recipient to apprehend a sense of being that crosses the symbolic realm of internal representation and the causal material realm of physical interaction. This is not just about seeing people as agents who can act, but also as people who have bodies. To express this idea more clearly: when we look at an art object, our inference of personality (or mind) is modelled on our inference of personality (or mind) from other people; just as much as we have our own network of 'I's inside our minds, we assume (and, indeed, we sometimes know) that the artwork is part of a similar network of 'I's; moreover, we locate an idea of that network as being in some sense 'inside' the artwork because it has an implicit material depth, in the same way as our own bodies do. For this reason, a painting's 'Botticelliness' is felt as though it is 'inside' the artwork, and this is what we infer by looking at its 'face'. In this way, we treat artworks like people.

To summarise: Gell sees art as a technology for doing. He adopts the 'index' as a technical term for art, from which agency is inferred following a process of abductive reasoning. Initially, agency is theorised as doing; but later on in the book, this shifts to being a consideration of the exercise of intent. Agency is a property of the active 'I', extended into the world. Nobody disbelieves the existence of the 'mysterious 'I'' but at the same time, no single thing really seems to correspond to it. Gell answers this problem by identifying an '*isomorphy of structure* between the cognitive processes we know (from inside) as 'consciousness' and the spatio-temporal structures of distributed objects in the artefactual realm—such as the *oeuvre* of one particular artist…' This conception offers insight into connoisseurial practice. What Gell fails to account for is how we move from the 'inside' (mysterious 'I') to the outside (action). This is a consequence of his methodological suppression of sensuality and undervaluing the material contiguity of the index.

As should be evident from the preceding review of *Rudiments*, *Iconography and Iconology* and *Art and Agency*, the history of interpretation has involved a number of different negotiations of analytical positions. Whereas connoisseurship is immanently connected to its object of study, both iconography and agential approaches are methodologically anaesthetic. The lesson of the past is to be wary of any single view, whether that is a strived-for sense of analytical exteriority or the adoption of a pragmatic model that grows from the demands of local detail. It is telling that ideas of agency in visual analysis come from ethnology / anthropology, and specifically from the discussion of other cultures. Gell's work was derived from his fieldwork in Melanesia; and more recently, agency has been used to explain the motivations of Renaissance rulers when they resort to apparently irrational, magical practices, such as the burial of medals in the foundations of buildings (Schraven 2009). In other words, agency is a tool that implies cultural distance as well as critical detachment. This distance is problematic in the consideration of an artwork that seeks to project social presence: an admission of the object's efficacy to act would be tantamount to a breach of Gell's 'methodological philistinism', an admission that the art object is seducing the no-longer impartial onlooker. In this way, the concept of agency is like a smoked lens: it might afford a closer look, but only at the expense of a certain obscurity.

4.6 The Methodology

The first third of this chapter conceived of meaning as arising from movement along an axis between alterity and mimesis, inside and outside, representation and action. The second third looked at the key ideas in the literature that have shaped the numismatic field. The most important idea is found in Berenson's work on connoisseurship and Gell's idea of agency. This is that an index of a material event gives access to qualities of personality. In all three texts we read about art's physiognomic aspect, what I have called art's 'face'. This final section considers the surface of this face and the way in which it may be conceived as a condition of thought and material structure, each being immanent to the other.

Art is person-like. It has a 'physiognomic aspect' (Gell 1998:15); this idea can be found in Jaeger, Belting, Freedberg, Mitchell and others. Panofsky and Gell use the same image, of the art object as a friend, while Berenson provides an account of art as a vehicle for personality. We have seen that the problem lies in drawing together a conception of personhood that is inner, 'I' centred representation, with one that is active and exterior. This problem is found in Berenson, who provides a perfect account of his empirical method but cannot suture this to its ultimate arbiter, aesthetic response: he witnesses the movement from index to quality, but without knowing how it works. The same problem is found in Gell: in his discussion of the index, he skips from inside (the causal Agent) to outside (the receptive Patient) without accounting for their meeting through the body of the work; he repeats this problem in his discussion of the 'I'.

Portrait medals have two faces. On one, there is a natural image of external likeness, a mimetic resemblance. This reaches out into the world. The obverse conveys a likeness and, as a withdrawal from similarity, a sense of judgement in its moral 'air'. This side shares our biological time: it is an account of our events and accidents. The reverse is literary and linguistic, a densely coded representation of an inner and enduring sense of self. In most medals after Pisanello, these are two sides of the same surface, and they sit across the axis between alterity and mimesis, representation and action, inside and outside. In the practice of our daily lives we take this sense of dual movement for granted. Even when we meet a person for the first time we assume their actions to be events that are representative of a core identity. We have no difficulty in perceiving quality from event, but to make progress in understanding the mechanics of the process, a theory of perception must be proposed.

In 1912, George Hill wrote that when 'ordinary mortals had begun to have medals made of themselves, then these little portraits, which could by casting be reproduced an indefinite number of times, began to serve much the same purpose as a photograph does today' (1912:9). It is through the example of photography that a theory of perception can be approached.

In wet-photography, the chemical reaction that occurs when a photosensitive medium is exposed to light is an entirely material event, pinned to a specific moment in time; but its products are interacted with as though they give the viewer real access to the person that they depict. In these photographs, the external events of life coincide with a more significant internal truth. Thus Roland Barthes, in his famous study of photography, *Camera Lucida*, sees his mother as an adult in her picture as a child, by virtue of 'the impossible science of the unique being' (2000:71). This is the atemporal and unevidential sense of 'who we are' as distinct from 'what we do'. We are unlikely to admit to the irrational magic of cherishing a photographic image, of finding more in there *really* than there *actually* is – (magic is what other people do – see Mitchell 2005:9); but neither would we subject our family albums to the anaesthetic logic implicit in ideas of agency, without also admitting that something would be lost in the telling.

The photograph has the authority of the event: it is an empirical record, a synchronic and objective truth. But through the viewer's attention it yields access to the character of the sitter, their quality, and in this sense, it is diachronic: forever. In this way the photograph exceeds its limits as a material object. When we respond to any image of an event and feel that there is contact with the person, whether that is a matter of affection or arousal or a feeling that we may be intruding on their grief or assaulting their dignity, we are moving from an image of now-time (similarity) to a quality of essential personality (dissimilarity). More pertinently, we feel that these two antinomies are bound together in the photograph. The most articulate theorist of this mystery is the Weimar philosopher Walter Benjamin. He is best known today for his work on aura.

Aura as an aesthetic concept must be carefully recovered from Benjamin's work. The word comes from the Greek for 'breath'. In general use, it signifies a kind of emanation from within an object or person to produce a surrounding atmosphere or glow that enlarges the sense of importance of the thing that it surrounds, sometimes also with a sense of premonition (OED 1993:148). It is associated with late 19th century spiritualist movements. Benjamin directly

addresses the concept in his best-known (and most auratic) essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, henceforth referred to as the *Artwork Essay* ([1936]2008a).

Despite the specific and fraught historical context of its genesis, this text is frequently cited in contemporary writing about reproduction and aura. My comments are restricted to the second version, which is the version that Benjamin himself considered to be the master-text (Editors 2008a:42-43). The common superficial reading of this essay is that authenticity – of the kind valued in connoisseurship – is art's dominant value, and that aura is an affect (an emotional response) of authenticity arising from propinquity to a sense of separation, uniqueness and tradition. Modern reproductive media, this reading continues, can liberate images from hierarchical and auratic modes of reproduction and production. This has the effect of shattering a cultural tradition that draws legitimacy from its cult-like experience of art, barring the entanglement of art and privilege. More importantly still such a move counters the exploitation of auratic culture by fascism[4]. What is remaindered by reproduction is the undesirable aura of authenticity (2008a:21):

> In even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence – and nothing else – that bears the mark of history to which this work has been subject… The here and now of the original underlies the concept of its authenticity, and on the latter in turn is founded the idea of a tradition which has passed the object down as the same, identical thing to the present day. *The whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological – and of course not only technological – reproduction.*

It is interesting to note that there is a strong echo of this concept in Berenson's own writing, when he comments that photographs, because they are truthful, are perfectly fit for the purposes of study, but to experience art properly one must visit art 'where it grows'.

[4] This is Benjamin's argument: though as politics is 'staged' in all states, and increasingly so, Böhme has speculated that the aestheticisation of politics is an effect of mass media and the 'necessity constantly to win the loyalty of the masses in order to remain capable of acting' (2017:32).

Benjamin provides a definition of aura in the *Art Work Essay* (2008a:23):

> What, then, is aura? A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be. To follow with the eye—while resting on a summer afternoon—a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch.

This definition first appears, with the addition of one clause, in the earlier text *The Little History of Photography*, (first published in 1931), henceforth *Little History* ([1931]2008b:285):

> …While at rest on a summer's noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour becomes part of their appearance—this is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch.

The additional clause, 'until the moment or the hour becomes part of their appearance', emphasises the sense of contiguity implicit in the image of a cast shadow. This is, of course, exactly the kind of contact that wet photography encodes, mechanically. Of course, within the logic of the surface reading of Benjamin's text, Berenson would be judged as a reactionary figure; but the film historian Miriam Bratu Hansen provides two reasons why such a reading needs to be resisted. Firstly, the *Artwork Essay* is unlike the rest of Benjamin's work. The essay was written in 1936, a moment of personal danger for the German, Jewish, and heterodox Marxist Benjamin, and its tone is strident and undialectic. It advocates progressive forms of social/cultural engagement in the face of the expert use of auratic forms in fascist propaganda; it is unlike Benjamin to be so prescriptive (Hansen 2012:103). Secondly, the concept of aura could only be inveigled into Marxist materialist discourse through an outward show of demolition. The very appearance of the concept within such a pragmatically directed essay suggests that Benjamin's attitude was at least ambivalent, and possibly equivocal (Hansen 2008:337); indeed, this equivocation is evident even in the strange circularity of the phrase 'unique apparition' (Böhme 2017:18). Clearly, we must be cautious of the easy reading.

It would not be useful here to work through all of the stages by which a more nuanced reading of Benjamin's concept of aura can be recovered, but the main text for this purpose is, indeed, this earlier essay.

Bearing these warnings in mind, the most accessible aspect of aura's definition is a sense of psychological, social or temporal distance that has been brought close to the viewer without undermining that sense of separation. In the *Little History* Benjamin describes early photographs of the upper classes as auratic artworks. These are presented as an example of social and technological synchronicity: the right class, self-possessed and certain, in full control of the appropriate apparatus with which to capture their privileged nature: the same class that, in humanist Italy, may have had medals made. The auratic appearance of men and women captured in these images is seen to stem from long exposure times and the consequent 'breathy halo that was sometimes captured with delicacy and depth by the now old fashioned oval frame' (283). This technology was the perfect match for depicting 'a class equipped with an aura that had seeped into the very folds of the man's frock coat or floppy cravat' (283). Although this suggests that the appearance of aura is technologically determined, the breathy halo being a necessary feature of the slow speed of early photographic process, it has its counterpart in a style of frame, an association of technological means (photography) and social usage (frame). Through the image of prolonged physical contact intimated in the 'folds' of clothing, a further equation is drawn between temporal duration of the exposure, and the longer duration of habituated wear; but again, as with the oval frame, the clothes are of a particularly coded nature: 'frock coat' and 'floppy cravat'. Both periods of time, photographic exposure and the wear of garments, impose a sense of distance: in the one case, forcing an unnaturally stiff and hieratic posture on the sitter, shrouding them in a 'breathy halo' as they hold themselves still for the camera; and in the other by being a symbol of social privilege that is individualised and naturalised over time. Both photograph and clothing become a store for the socially privileged nature of the sitter, deposited through duration of contact. Aura, in this sense, is a quality of the index; but these works are auratic because, just as much as they are held

close to the viewer, they remain temporally and socially distant, 'the unique appearance of a distance, no matter how close it may be' (2008b:285).

Later on in the *Little History*, Benjamin examines a photograph of the photographer Dauthenday and his fiancée, 'the woman he later discovered, on a day shortly after the birth of her sixth child, lying in the bedroom of their Moscow house with her veins slashed.' This victim of future suicide is described in astonishingly auratic terms (276-277):

> …her gaze passes [her husband] by, absorbed in an ominous distance. Immersed long enough in such a picture, one recognises to what extent opposites touch, here too: the most precise technology can give its products a magical value... the beholder feels an irresistible compulsion to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, the here and now, with which reality has, so to speak, seared through the image-character of the photograph, to find the inconspicuous place where, within the suchness of that long-past minute, the future nests today- and so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it.

In this curious passage, the reader is drawn back to a sense of personality and personal fate. There is a sense of futurity here – in this case a grim one – but one that projects the essential nature of the woman who is depicted across time, from a specific moment, 'the suchness of that long-past minute', to the present.

Benjamin's writing is marked by a rather esoteric or even cabalistic tendency (Hansen 2008:337,342; Buck-Morrs 1991:230). The French cultural theorist Roland Barthes is more direct, but he describes a similar, albeit rather more affirming, encounter with a photograph. Writing of the period immediately after his mother's death, he describes going through a number of photographs, searching for an image of her that appeared to be a truthful representation, not so much of her at a moment in time, as of her essential being (2000:67-69):

> There I was, alone in the apartment where she had died, looking at these pictures of my mother, one by one, under the lamp, gradually moving back in time with her, looking for the truth of the face I loved. And I found it… The photograph was very old. The corners were blunted from having been pasted into an

> album, the sepia print had faded, and the picture just managed to show two children standing together at the end of a little wooden bridge in a glassed-in conservatory… My mother was five at the time (1898), her brother seven. He was leaning against the bridge railing, along which he had extended an arm; she, shorter than he, was standing a little back, facing the camera… she was holding one finger in the other hand, as children often do, in an awkward gesture… I studied the little girl and at last rediscovered my mother. The distinctness of her face, the naïve attitude of her hands, the place she had docilely taken without either showing or hiding herself, and finally her expression, which distinguished her, like Good from Evil, from the hysterical little girl… all this had transformed the photographic pose into that untenable paradox which she had nonetheless maintained all her life: the assertion of a gentleness. In this little girl's image I saw the kindness which had formed her being immediately and forever, without her having inherited it from anyone…

In each of these two cases, Benjamin in relation to the suicide, Barthes in relation to the image of his mother, the viewer of a photograph has recovered the sitter's enduring diachronic identity from a synchronic image formed over seconds. How this is constructed is subtly different in each case: Benjamin moves in his writing from an ordinary sense of propinquity and privilege in the photographs of the upper bourgeoisie to something that seems rather more like divination in the case of Dauthenday's wife; but Barthes sees a *quality* in the photograph of his mother *as a small girl* that connects this image to his own memory of his mother that was formed over his lifetime. This quality is recognised as the 'truth of the face'; this is not the truth of mimesis: it moves from the recognition of an outward similarity to a higher quality of essential being. In this way it is exactly how connoisseurship works; Barthes could be said to be practicing a connoisseurship of personal images. In each case, the experience is auratic.

Aura as a perceptual affect is something that is felt: it arises from a perceived simultaneity of closeness and distance. This simultaneity can occur across one or more of the axes of physical distance, temporal distance, and social distance. In the case of images of people, temporal aura is a feeling of truth, of intense recognition, that connects synchronic and diachronic self.

Thought of in these terms, aura might be useful as an historical literary or artistic concept: Benjamin's writing might form an example, alongside Berenson's essay, of a structure of analytical engagement that, in the era of the camera phone, is historical: over. But aura is not just a word for a perceptual affect. It also describes the propinquity of separation and closeness that is an inescapable condition of being in the world. Photographs and medals are one form of surface; the surface to which we now turn is the surface of human experience.

4.6.1 Human Experience

In the classic definition of the *Artwork Essay*, aura is defined from an experience of nature – this should alert us to its application beyond the objects of culture (Böhme 2017:18). Benjamin's first use of the term aura was in a short text about hashish written in 1930. In this he asserts that (2005:327-328):

> …genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine. Second, the aura undergoes changes, which can be quite fundamental, with every movement the aura-wreathed object makes. Third, genuine aura can in no sense be thought of as a spruced-up version of the magic rays beloved of spiritualists and described and illustrated in vulgar works of mysticism. On the contrary, the characteristic feature of genuine aura is ornament, an ornamental halo, in which the object or being is enclosed in a case.

The belief implicit in this text is that aura is not a product of perception, but its paradigm. Every object of the world appears to the viewer as though it is encased; aura is a form of emanation from within an object that connects it to the viewer while holding it distinct. The simplest expression of this second form of aura, which I will call philosophical aura, is that it describes the necessary simultaneity of detachment and contact that is implicit in any act of perception, detachment because the observer is maintained as a distinct entity from the object of perception, contact because the object of perception is perceptible.

To an even greater extent than is the case with the recovery of aura as a perceptual affect, Benjamin's philosophical project needs to be constructed from the many lapidary and often Delphic fragments that form his literary

estate. More than most other writers, he provides prismatic shards with which to think, rather than a resolved epistemology that can be grasped and tested. This recovery of his philosophical project is dependent on a number of studies, by Susan Buck-Morrs (1992; 1991), Miriam Bratu Hansen (2012; 2008; 1987), Beatrice Hanssen (2005), and in particular Howard Caygill's study *The Colours of Experience* (1998). Towards the conclusion of this project, I became aware of another significant contribution to Benjamin's epistemology, which, as here, takes Benjamin's work as offering insights into both the nature of experience and its interstitial, surface-like nature: this is Gernot Böhme's *Atmospheric Architectures* (2017); this volume is a rare opportunity to read Böhme's work in English.

In Benjamin's work, the quality of self-in-otherness is proximal to the dialectic nature of his project as a whole. He began his career as a Kantian, but came to reject its emphasis on *a priori* reasoning because this represented, to him, a diminution of experience, and where experience is diminished, so too is philosophy. In Caygill's reconstruction of Benjamin's philosophical project, truth is not built from the smallest axiomatic precept upwards, but begins at the other end of the scale, with the limits of human experience. This way of proceeding is the opposite of the Kantian starting point, and follows from perception of the world and self to seek the limit of everything that is available to reason, sensation and intuition combined. This presents a field of perception.

The next step is to expand this field further through speculation and doubt until the outer limit of imaginable reality is found. This finite limit of experience is circumscribed by an intimation of the Absolute, an inkling that the human surfaces of experience are in some way incomplete or inadequate, and that there is something inherently ungraspable in reality, a mute remainder. This early part of Benjamin's project is constructed from various aphoristic sources written between 1914 and 1921. An important text is the short fragment *On Perception in Itself* (1917), quoted below in its entirety. This suggests that perception is not passive, but an active form of 'reading' (Benjamin in Caygill 1998:3):

> Perception is reading… Only that appearing in the surface is readable… Surface that is configuration – absolute continuity.

The concept of there being a limited surface to experience follows Kant's precept that mind plays an active role in structuring reality, (we have already seen how this is fundamental to Panofsky's system of iconography). The surface correlates loosely with an idea of language, which is both expressive and perceptive. What is perceived is what is translated from its appearance in a natural surface into a human surface of perception. Although human language can contain an infinite variety of possible configurations, equivalent to the infinity of possible word-combinations that could be arranged across a page, the ability to express natural surfaces of experience in human perceptual terms is limited. Thus only a partial constellation of the total perceptual field can be approached through any given perceptual surface. In other words, in human perception an element of experience is lost, as human language fails to accommodate the full range of expression in nature. Something like this concept has already been encountered in the implicit negativity of Saussure's theory of language. But there is a key difference here, in that Benjamin does not so much advance a theory of language as an active theory of reading (Caygill 1998:3-19). Caygill's exposition is more detailed and precise than other authors' but the general observation of active reading is shared by all of the main authors on the subject, (for instance Buck-Morrs 1991:160,229; Hansen 1987:198).

In Benjamin's system, which is not limited to art but to *the perception of all things*, exteriority emerges through the first set of human correspondences, as lack; as soon as perception occurs, we are necessarily separated from its objects; but in the process of translating the language of nature into human perception, nature retains a 'mute expression that is enough to trouble the absolute claim to the meaning of language' (Caygill 2010:243). This is what is remaindered in linguistic expression. There is a choice to be made here, between a centripetal move that takes the host language as prior, and reduces other languages into it, thereby increasing denotative distance; and a centrifugal move, which seeks to translate the host language itself, in an act of

mimetic transformation, in which the host language stretches itself across its other. In Caygill, this is presented as the difference between two forms of knowledge: knowledge as judgement, and knowledge as transformation. In Didi-Huberman's work we can see the same choice being practiced in interpretation, between knowledge (which corresponds to judgement) and truth (which is empirical and sensuous) (2005). In this chapter, I have built on Gregory Bateson's image of the blind-man's stick to create an axis of movement between difference and similarity, abstraction and reality, language and material, and representation and action. The same sense of movement can be found along this axis.

This thesis is concerned with what happens when we see an art object, like a medal, and understand a quality from it that is real, but not actually present. The question that it seeks to answer is how we can understand the relationship between material and content. This problem has presented itself in several guises throughout this chapter. In Berenson's work, as Gell's, we can see a belief in the movement from index to quality, from event to personality (or agency). Similar beliefs are expressed by all of those authors who discuss the personlikeness of art, Mitchell, Belting, Jaeger – even Panofsky. The point that I want to make clear here is that when we consider how an object is 'more than' what it is as a material entity, this problem has its corollary in how we are ourselves 'more than' the materiality of our own bodies. Because we cannot escape being bound in creation and yet we see something in each case that is somehow more than the material at hand, though the terms may be different, the problem is the same: how is it that content and material are cleft? *Where does the more come from?*

The theme of this research – or rather the language in which it is expressed – derives from Marcel Proust's definition of the virtual. We think of the virtual as a modern phenomenon; but the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce defines the term in 1902 with a Latin quotation from the mediaeval theologian Duns Scotus: 'No object will produce a simple and proper concept of itself and a simple and proper concept of another object unless it contains this second object essentially or virtually' (Scotus in Peirce 1902:763-764; trans.

Wolter 1987:23); Scotus' point here, the point that Peirce is borrowing, is that all things, all objects, are virtual at the moment of their perception. At a fundamental level, all objects are *both* actual and virtual. Virtuality, it is important to stress, is a form of reality; the virtual quality is really there, but it is not concrete, not actual (Shields 2003:2,18-44). Peirce does not use this language, but we might think of it as a stepping out or ecstasy. As Böhme puts it, returning to the glow of virtuality (2017:51-52):

> Being blue on the side of the thing corresponds to seeing blue on the side of the subject. [But] it does not follow, of course, that being blue is something that determines the thing in and of itself – it is, though, the colour of its presence: colour is the visible presence of a thing. As such it is simultaneously also spatial. Through colour, the thing asserts its presence in space and radiates into it… As present, the colourful thing can be localized yet, in a certain way, its colourfulness is everywhere… The other sensitive qualities should likewise be interpreted as forms of presence or ecstasies of things. This should be all the easier since sound or voice or smell are, after all, energetic or material emanations by which things fill a space and thereby evidence their presence… The sun shines, the dog barks, the stone is warm – yes, but then also the flower is blue…

This is Benjamin's realisation; all of these things are perceptible only though the mimetic faculty of sensation: the eye is like the sun; the ear is like the dog; the hand is like the stone; nature shows itself to us and we see it because we are also natural, an aspect of creation. As Böhme puts it: 'A showing itself on the side of nature, or a stepping-outside-of-themselves of natural things, corresponds with receptivity on the side of the subject' (38). When we perceive something then we are in a state of ecstasy and perceiving an object in its own ecstatic glow; we are, nevertheless, also in a state of alterity and inwardness in respect of this object, as this is the second necessary condition of perception. Returning to the work at the top of the chapter, on systems of meaning and language, we can see the same contiguity of similarity and difference in Peirce's theory of language. Language and perception are the same: we read from the world, and in reading we structure experience. This perception, as I have described, is a form of movement, a thickening of the surface of experience,

which happens when we step out from ourselves and our objects of perception similarly escape their own limits in what Benjamin called the 'unique apparition'. Ingold has recently described surfaces as 'primary conditions for the generation of meaning' (2017:99); he is right, but not in any sense that the surface is thin: meaning is a thick surface, woven between sameness and difference.

This work came from thinking about, reading about and handling art medals. As a chief method of numismatics is the connoisseurship of inter-subjectivity it is perhaps inevitable that the problem is expressed in terms that are tinged with an incipient subject-orientation. We are accustomed, in any case, to think of reading as being a taking-in, a deposit made through the eyes and into the keep-safe of the brain. Perhaps we should attempt a different mode of expression. One way of doing this is to think of aura as a property of *all* things, as Benjamin teaches, of the object of perception and the subject of experience. If we do so, we can rethink perception as an atmosphere, between the perceiver and the perceived (Böhme 2017:13-54, esp. 20-24,46-52). More accurately still, we might come to understand the site of perception as the intersection of multiple atmospheres, an over-lapping glow within which each subject-object dwells.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has developed meaning as movement between inside and outside, alterity and mimesis, representation and action. The key idea that was taken from the numismatic literature was that of the index as a material event that gives access to qualities of personality. In these texts we read about art's physiognomy, what I have called its face. The face as surface has become a vital idea in recent debate.

Medals and photographs are examples of art forms that show us faces. When we look at these we move from an idea of similarity that is time-bound and causal-material to a quality of essential being. The problem that needed to be solved was how we can understand the mechanism of movement from index to quality. This requires a theory of perception.

This theory is encountered in Benjamin's work. We can see it in its small form, its cultural form, in Benjamin's writing on photography, in which he describes aura as a perceptual affect that arises from the propinquity of separation and contact that this art form encodes.

In its large form, this same propinquity describes the face of human experience. We are all in an indexical relation to creation. Perception is an active form of reading: we weave a surface as we read it, though the relative operation of similarity and difference; this is a gain in human language and a loss from creation.

Human experience, therefore, is defined by contact and loss. The surface of human experience is woven between these points, between mimesis and alterity. This is the atmospheric skin of perception, which we live within. It swathes our experience as our own skin binds our bodies. In this way, meaning is immanent to creation because it is from creation that the face of meaning is woven, and we cannot perceive creation without weaving, because to perceive is to weave.

One of the features of this lively debate of surfaces is that, unlike Lucretius, contemporary ideas rarely account for actual, concrete touch. Thus Bruno (2014:19,248-249n8) and Ingold (2017:101; 2013:20) describe a 'haptic' visuality, a virtual touch. Ingold is one of the most tactile thinkers in this area, but even (or perhaps particularly) for him, there is something idealistic or ideal about its value. It is not easy to distinguish between the theoretical, metaphorical or propositional advocacy of touch in this literature: it is produced in the main by philosophers, critics, anthropologists, and not by artists or craftspeople[5], (or, for that matter, surgeons, midwives, chefs, gardeners: the majority who work with palpable reality). Similarly, Böhme accounts for an aesthetics of production and reception, but neither he nor indeed Benjamin describes the technics of production of surface or aura or atmosphere as something that is *made with matter*. In the concluding two sections, I will provide two case studies of such a technical production. The first of these is a

[5] Lee (2016) and Millar and Kettle (2018) are exceptions to this. It is interesting that both of these studies concern clothing.

speculative reconstruction of the bright disc in the British Museum, the *Constantine*; the last chapter is an account of a modern craft surface. Through these, and particularly the latter, we will see how content is immanent to material, not just in theory, or in perception, but in practice.

5. *Constantine* and the Duke of Berry

5.0 Introduction

The last two chapters of this thesis present case studies in which the ideas developed in chapter four are pressed into analysis. This chapter looks at the relationship between content and material in the case of the medal of *Constantine the Great* (Inv. M.269, **figure 5**).

This chapter argues that the *Constantine* is a device for yielding access to qualities from which content is actively constructed through practice and play. Considered as a solitary object, the surviving medal that remains in the British Museum draws together a range of identities and holds these in a contiguous and overlapping space. We can see how these identities are present on the surface of the medal today, and we can imagine how, in the fifteenth century, they would have worked to construct a new and prospective identity for its owner.

We also know that shortly after its creation the medal was inventoried alongside a number of other objects. Reading these inventories, it appears that it was part of a particular grouping of objects within this collection. This chapter speculates that together with these other objects, it forms a more complex system through which a larger range of identities and futures can be constructed, but that these are only refracted from the object when it is handled and 'played' with as part of a set.

These findings are pertinent to the main question of this research, but they are dependent on a new contribution to numismatic knowledge, presented here for the first time. This is that the medal is dependent on the seal imagery of Baldwin II, last Latin Emperor of Constantinople (r.1228/1240-1261).[6] This dependency is two-fold. Firstly, the idea that more than one representation is present in the depiction is dependent on establishing the presence of at least one other image besides Constantine himself. Secondly, it suggests that the medal is intentionally like a seal, a form of index by which personal presence

[6] Until Baldwin reached majority regents governed his empire on his behalf. From 1240 he reigned directly.

and assent is attested. It is necessary, therefore, to demonstrate this new connection before the larger argument is treated, and this requires some work.

The structure of the chapter is as follows.

Section 5.1 describes the composition of the Constantine and the material clues that the medal acts as a device for gathering and for holding, like a seal. This gives a sense of my affective response to the medal, and some sense of how the research into this object began.

Section 5.2 demonstrates the dependency of the medal on Baldwin's seal. This begins with a short review of the most pertinent scholarly literature. It identifies a recent departure in understanding the early medal as being in some way associated with the cause of Eastern Christianity and crusade. Because this chapter claims new knowledge in relation to iconography, a detailed summary of previous understanding of the connection between seals and medals follows this review. This is followed by a description of the circumstances of production; the imagery of Baldwin II; the connections between the epigraphy of the seal and the medal; an account of the likely transmission of the image of Baldwin to the Valois court; and a description of the interrelation of the principal figures.

The final part of the chapter, section 5.3, describes the function of the medal as a device for drawing these identities together into one surface for their refraction, and presents speculative thoughts regarding the role of the medal within its larger collection.

The conclusion of this chapter, presented in section 5.4, is that this medal is resistant to conventional iconographic analysis because it is not intended to have one fixed and rational meaning. For this reason, the medal cannot be understood in relation to denoted meaning. It is only when it is considered as a complex material index and as an object for use and play that its purpose comes into focus. In this way, its content is seen to be immanent to its materiality.

5.1 The Material Image

Much of the work of this chapter is iconographical, so how does my approach differ from that of 'traditional' iconography, which I am critical of in chapter 4? From the late 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, the

importance of affective response diminished in art history as the discipline gained status as a science. The position of analysis that is constructed here is distinct from those of science or the humanities. In science - as in iconography - truth is partible from material. In the humanities, truth is approached as the object is situated in its context. But in the arts, truth emerges from a creative engagement with its objects in which the viewer plays an active and mimetic role. It is both contextual and active. This creative engagement is appropriate to understanding this object because like all medals it is a haptic device – an object to be handled, collected, and placed against other objects to create new correspondences. The approach taken here is guided by my subjective response to the medal itself, and it is imaginative in reconstructing how the medal may have been used.

Rather like Hilliard's *Elizabeth I*, the *Constantine* was an object of fascination for me before it was an object for research. I was struck by its hieratic presence and the fineness of its design and execution. Together these created an impression of inwardness, as though the object held something inside it. In particular, I felt at the outset that there was what Berenson might describe as a 'Quality' of Byzantine antiquity in the image: the holy rider, Saint Constantine on horseback, reminded me of some Byzantine apotropaic amulets that I had been studying several years earlier (**figure 43**). I felt sure that there was a connection, a kind of 'air' about the object.

Reading about the medal bore out the notion that the deportment of the rider was both unusual and significant. The image is distinctly unusual in the context of the late mediaeval period. The emperor's horse appears to be prancing rather than charging, and the rider is neither armoured nor armed. Instead, he is wearing an imperial *pallium* and a loose cloak, the ends of which are gathered up in his right hand. He holds the horse's reins very lightly in his left hand, in the lightest of possible open-palmed grips. The reins are gathered through a loop that sits on the horse's thorax in a manner that appears to be completely unique. The strangeness of Constantine's grip and the arrangement of the reins, both of which would appear to leave the rider with no means of controlling his mount, is the cornerstone of Mark Jones' argument that the

medal is the work of the Limbourg brothers (1979b:38), as the image is repeated in their work in a manner that gives some narrative context to the peculiar arrangement of the reins. Given the degree of scholastic attention that this medal has attracted, and not least Jones' use of its peculiarities, it is clear that the posture of the rider and the arrangement of the reins are not generally repeated in Western art.

This spare and strange image, composed of few parts like a poetic riddle, appeared to mean something, but what? Its abeyance of reference has a formal corollary. Signs point outwards, towards the things they represent. This object gestures outwards and inwards at the same time: it points to other people, things, and ideas; but at the same time, it folds inwards and gathers its referents into itself.

Medal depicting *Constantine the Great*, 1402

The impression of folding arises from play between the two sides. The singularity of its obverse stands in relation to an intricate reverse, which is beautiful rather than talismanic. While the late Gothic visual idiom of the two faces is consistent, correspondences in the composition of the two halves regulate the relationship between them (**figure 5** and above): the raised hind leg of the horse is at the same angle and a similar length to the older woman's right leg; the straight foreleg of the horse is similarly mirrored in the younger

woman's left leg; and the line formed between Constantine's right hand and the ring at the base of his horse's neck is at the same angle as the leash leading from the young woman's right hand to the bird. The most striking rhyme is that created by the correspondence between the Cross and Constantine's upper torso; these two elements occupy the equivalent space on their respective fields, Constantine's shoulders being translated into the Cross' transverse beams. The effect of these visual rhymes is subtler than mere progression. The impression is one of involution, of the reverse opening out from the obverse, as though the more complicated image is nested within it, and so the singularity of the obverse is maintained, nesting a multitude of images inside it. To use an analogy, the impression of opening out from a singular image is like revealing the inside of a child's paper fortune-teller (**figure 44**). This sense of complexity, folded into a single unitary whole, creates Gell's sense of 'enchantment', the 'halo effect' created by the apparent magic of a finely wrought set of internal relations (Gell 2010:464-482), conferring a kind of charismatic appeal on the image of the rider, and, by association, its patron.

The medal's compositional self-mirroring creates what I have called a 'material iconicity': the medal points to other things, but mainly to itself. This is an ungainly phrase, something between an oxymoron and a tautology, admittedly, and it could be criticised for being unwisely semiotic. Böhme (2017:15), among others, is critical of the dominance of language and an approach that takes 'even images under the sign'; my construction – material iconicity – seems to do exactly that; but Böhme's criticism is pitched at the priority given to denoted meaning in interpretation. Following the work set out in chapter four, it should be clear that this research follows a wholly different idea of meaning which seeks its emergence in movement, in the surface of perception drawn between our faculties of similarity and difference. The argument of this chapter is that the *Constantine* is a device that works by opening up and exploiting the thick surface – the atmosphere – of this distance, between material and language, hand and brain. This is what I hope to intimate by the phrase 'material iconicity' – it gestures to other things, like a sign, but it draws them into it, like a trap.

Most art medals work a little like this, in that the two faces are separated by a thickness, and they have weight, a body, that makes them seem more present; as Attwood puts it (2012:9): 'Here the tactile is as important as the visual in a way that is not true of any other artistic medium'. In most medals this space between the two faces is solid: either cast or struck metal. By contrast, the *Constantine* is hollow – its internal space is like a locket. Indeed, Tanja Jones has recently argued that this medal is deliberately like a special form of jewellery, a Byzantine container for relics called an *enkolpion*, (plural *enkolpia*) (T. Jones 2011:8,27-30). A relic is an object that is a remnant or trace of what it represents. It is, to use one of Peirce's classic examples of indexicality like a knock at the door: it signifies that there is something real, but not actual, something that cannot yet be seen but that is nevertheless there. My argument is complementary to this. I do not think that this medal is deliberately like a locket, but I do think that it is like a metal seal. Gold seals are made in the same way as this medal, and like relics they also act as indexes. They suture a synchronous act of ascent to a diachronic identity. In this way, seals prefigure the play between the mimetic and the allegoric faces of the portrait medal.

Art objects make us behave as though meaning inheres in images, when common sense dictates that it is only through the internalisation of cultural rules that meaning can be read. An implication of interiority is a feature of art, as it is of people. We can see the 'face' of the object, but we assume and behave as though there is an activating identity behind the face. As Alex Potts has cautioned, we must engage more with the materiality of signs if we are to resolve this paradox, and attempt to understand the *how* of images, as opposed to their *what* (Potts 1996:17-30). Of course, classic iconography makes no such attempt to understand this – the way in which the *Constantine* has been treated in the past is summarised in the following section – but the approach taken here is much closer to the active image practice described by Mitchel Merback in his work on Dürer's *Melencolia I* (2017). This remains alive to the sensuous appeal that the object makes to the viewer as an aspect of mental, and in this case physical, practice. It does not seek meaning in the form of a solution to a riddle. Instead, it tries to understand the process from which meanings cleave.

The process is what really matters: it remains active and can never be resolved. That is why people go back to art objects that they have seen before – there is something immanent that has yet to be seen. Whereas *Melencolia I* is deliberately resistant to meaning, my hypothesis here is that *Constantine* is deliberately open to multiple readings. It is a tool for drawing identities together and for constructing fresh images.

There is a degree of hubris about this line of thinking: this object has been the subject of academic speculation for hundreds of years, and I am choosing to focus on something that has barely featured in the literature. However, if we follow the line of thinking set out in the previous chapter, that to interpret is to move, to 'spread the object out', then we need also to take responsibility for the choices made in determining that movement, as these construe what is understood as meaning. In this case, the guide is the object itself, and the inwardness that is intimated by its composition. This choice is emphasised by the fact that this inwardness has been ignored by nearly all of the previous authors who have addressed the medal, most of who have lost sight of it as a material thing.

5.2 The Dependency of *Constantine* on the Iconography of Baldwin II

This section describes the dependency of the *Constantine* on the seal imagery of Baldwin II.

5.2.1 The Berry Medals: a Literature Review

The medals of the Duke of Berry, the *Constantine* and *Heraclius,* have been extensively studied over a long period. In addition to the numismatic literature covered in chapter two, it is important to describe that portion of the literature that remains pertinent to the *Constantine* today. There are three useful modern studies that deal with this medal at length: the best analysis of iconography and attribution is by Mark Jones (1979b), and a useful summary of the history of interpretation is provided by Roberto Weiss (1963). Both of these studies prioritise the object as it comes down to us, which is to say, in most versions, as a cast medal. This approach has the effect of domesticating the object as an

interesting but marginal antecedent to 'true' medallic art, an object that was made before its time, a kind of early-'almost'-medal. Other useful and broadly consistent points of reference are provided by: George Hill (1910); sections of Stephen Scher's larger studies (2000; 1994); and parts of Weiss' *Palaeologus* (1966).

The version of the medal referenced in the present research is not cast, but hollow silver repoussé. It is closest to the original form described in the Duke's inventories, and probably the earliest surviving copy (M. Jones 1982:18). The Duke's inventories describe copies that were cast in gold (Guiffrey 1894:73 #201 for *Constantine* and #202 for *Heraclius*) – one of these may be the copy that survived in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France until 1831, when it was stolen and melted down (British Museum 2017:unpaginated); neither the original repoussé medals nor the contemporary gold casts survive. Among all of the literature, the only study that pays adequate attention to the medal's original form, a hollow gold pendant, as well as to the political context that informed its production, is by Tanja Jones (2011). Her research builds on one other important modern essay, Irving Lavin's *Pisanello and the Invention of the Renaissance Medal* (1993), which made early inroads in contextualising the medal with reference to the Byzantine court. This short but important essay draws attention to shared circumstances of production that unite Pisanello's first medal and the *Constantine.* Lavin observes that the *Constantine* was made at the time of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II's visit to Paris, and the *Palaeologus* at the time of John VIII's visit to Italy, Manuel's successor and son. Both of these beleaguered Byzantine rulers visited Europe to solicit military assistance against the Ottoman Turks, and Lavin seeks to read the medals in that light.

Tanja Jones follows Lavin's lead: her doctoral thesis is built on the premise that Pisanello's adoption of the medal was not just inspired by the example of the Berry medallions and their Byzantine associations, but rather can be wholly explained by them, understanding of the early art medal requiring knowledge of the Berry medallions and their Byzantine associations (2011); she has since persuasively expanded these ideas in later articles (2015; 2014); but the

evidence for a specific Byzantine impulse remains predominantly circumstantial and contextual, apparent similarities to specific objects such as Byzantine religious pendants, the *enkolpia*, appearing a little strained (i.e. T. Jones 2011:8,27-30) – this reference is, however, the only point in the literature where the inside of the medal is thought about as though it might be significant.

5.2.2 Contribution to Numismatic and Iconographic Knowledge

A specific finding of this chapter is that the *Constantine* develops the seal iconography of Baldwin II. This is a new contribution to knowledge.

In order to understand the connection between Baldwin II and Constantine the Great, a range of objects must be referenced. These are: a lead seal of Alexios Komnenos Angelos as sebastokrator c.1190, Byzantine emperor from 1195 – 1203 (Zacos and Veglery 1972:1555-7 no.2745b, **figure 45**); two extant lead seals of Baldwin II, last Latin Emperor of Constantinople of the type in use between 1240 and 1261 (Zacos and Veglery 1972:102-104, nos.114a and 114b, **figure 46 and figure 47**); a gold bull preserved in the National Archives of France of 1268 (J.419,5, **figure 48**); an engraving of a now lost gold seal of Baldwin II of 1247 together with the transcription of a letter, which are preserved in reproduction in the *Histoire de la Sainte-Chapelle* (Morand 1790:8,68 and plate following, **figure 49**). These objects are discussed in detail when they impinge on the argument; but if the images are reviewed at the outset of the chapter, the reader may well be able to infer the argument that is to follow. More than elsewhere in this thesis, it is necessary to keep the volume of image at hand.

My experience of conducting this research was one of discovery, but it is not the intention to present this chapter in the manner of a mystery, with its dramatic conclusion at the end. The connection between the medal and the seals of Baldwin II can be made on a *prima facie* basis at the outset. These are: composition; the position of the horses' legs; the distinctly peculiar position of the riders' left hand and the light open-palmed and single-handed grip on the reins (**figure 50**); and – once the documents to which the seals are appended are considered – suggestively similar titles for the two emperors, comparing the epigraphy on the medal with the titles in the documents. More generally, the

composition and deportment of the rider may be seen to derive from a Crusader image of sanctified power, drawing on the iconography of the warrior saints of Byzantine and Crusader culture, and the more distant legacy of imperial Rome.

Numismatic literature makes little reference to seals as a potential source of influence for the Berry medals, or medals in general. Lavin compares the *Constantine* to 'the dashing equestrian knights surrounded by inscriptions depicted on medieval seals' (1993:68). Lavin's choice of words is rash. It is a very general comparison, and it breaks down once the particulars of the unarmed figure and his prancing mount are considered. Reference to a catalogue of seals such as Walter de Grey Birch's of 1907 reveals that the majority of equestrian seals depict a heavily armed rider astride a galloping horse, sword aloft and ready to strike, engaged in the principal duty of a knight of the time: defending his land. Patient reference to seal catalogues and collections produces some objects that seem a little more alike, where the horses and their mounts are perhaps in less of a 'dash', for instance a seal of the city Corbie of 1228 (Trilling 2001:unpaginated, **figure 51**; replica of D5761, Archives Nationales, Paris). Here the elbow of the rider's left arm is forward of his hand, the rider is not armoured, and his head and the horse's legs penetrate the space reserved for the legend; but the epigraphy, posture and implicit pace of travel are all quite different from the *Constantine*. There is nothing among the seals of Northern Europe that really equates with its imagery.

Setting imagery to one side, and concentrating instead on form and function, Scher mentions seals as a potential source for the 'distinctive size, type, and composition of the Renaissance medal.' He continues (1994:16):

> Their extraordinary quality attests to their importance, and reflects the stature of the artists – goldsmiths and court painters – called upon to design and possibly even cut the dies for them. Seals manifest the large size, the extreme delicacy of the work, the placement of the subject within a circular field, the use of inscriptions, the beauty of the script, the frequent appearance of obverse and reverse, and the statement of social position that are all associated with the medal.

As a general statement, this seems quite accurate: there is much that is self-evidently cognate about the two art forms. Elsewhere, he gives a specific example. The inventory of the Duke of Berry's collection records that he owned a medal that showed the Virgin Mary on one side, and on the other a portrait of the Duke himself (Guiffrey 1896:227 #234). It is thought that the obverse survives, in a cast in the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (**figure 52**), but that the portrait face does not. Had this survived as well it would be a quite exceptional object: as the earliest representation of a living person in a medallic form, it may have encouraged a rather different construction of the history of the medal. Be that as it may, the object has been lost; but to gain some sense of what it may have looked like, Scher reproduces one of the Duke's seals, which shows a portrait of the Duke flanked by two other figures (2000:4,20plate1.9; also reproduced in Gandilhon 1933:Pl.XIV/4, **figure 53**).

Neither Scher nor Lavin pursue this line of enquiry; nevertheless, Tanja Jones is anxious to dismiss it. Referring to Scher, she objects that the Duke's seals 'provide no precedent for the double-sided form of the Berry medallions, the complex Christian iconography, or the execution of the medallions in precious materials' (2011:26); instead Jones develops the riddle of this exceptional medal by reading it as a pendent – as it is described in the inventories – and then understanding the pendent as a pseudo-*enkolpion*; thereby, she intends to open up the medal's iconography to understanding (17-49, esp.27-29). It is unfortunate for her argument that most *enkolipa* are hinged crosses, including the examples that she cites; moreover, despite similarity of facture, there are no close coincidences of imagery or epigraphy on which she can rely. The comparison with seals seems much closer, especially since many of these were in fact made from precious materials, including gold.

Surprisingly, among all of the literature considered here, there is only one reference to gold seals. Weiss writes: 'As far as their general appearance is concerned, the two medallions, and specially the obverse of the Constantine piece, do remind us particularly of the seals of late medieval princes or lords. Like so many of these seals, the obverse with the riding Constantine shows an equestrian figure encircled by an inscription' (1963:131-132). The connection is

not pursued within the main body of the text, but in a footnote Weiss continues: 'Cf., for instance the golden bull of Baldwin II, Emperor of Constantinople… and the seals of Jean, duke of Berry' (132). Weiss provides two sets of references. The latter cover the duke's seals. This refers to two objects, the same seal that Scher calls attention to (**figure 53**), and another object that Weiss considers more interesting, an equestrian seal of the duke's of 1367 (**figure 54**). There is little in the imagery that is self-evidently similar about this object: the horse on the Berry seal is charging, carrying a fully armoured Western knight, who brandishes a sword; but the letter forms are similar, and the extremities of the horseback image penetrate the band reserved for the legend in a similar way; it may also be the object's execution that stimulated Weiss' attention.

Weiss' connection with Baldwin's seal is more propitious. In this footnote, Weiss provides a reference to a book by Percy Schramm on medieval symbols of state (1956:plate 92,e). This reproduces both faces of a golden bull of Baldwin II. Schramm does not give full details; however, as can be discerned from correspondences in image and epigraphy, but even more securely from identical chips and defects in the rim, this is clearly the same seal as is reproduced by Schlumberger in his *Sigillographie de l'Orient Latin*, which identifies it as the hitherto mentioned golden bull appended to an act dated Paris 1268, and preserved in the National Archives of France (1943:169/11, plate VII/5; AN.J.419,5, **figure 48**). The similarity with Baldwin's seals is developed no further anywhere in the literature than it is in this rather oblique footnote. The reason for this may be that Weiss is concerned with epigraphy, and there is little suggestive affinity between the epigraphy of this seal and the inscription on the obverse of the *Constantine*; furthermore, the imagery on this particular seal of Baldwin's is markedly less similar than the examples presented below.

Beyond the larger contribution of the thesis as a whole, the contribution to numismatic and iconographic knowledge that this chapter makes is to develop – for the first time – the connection between the *Constantine* and a specific Latin precedent: the seals of Baldwin II. This connection supports the emergent view,

proposed by Lavin and developed by Tanja Jones, that the early medal is associated with the cause of Eastern Christianity.

5.2.3 The Iconography of Baldwin II as Prototype

My initial instinct was that the image of the mounted rider on the medal was related in some way to Byzantine images of a figure described in the literature as a Holy Rider (Walter 2003). We can see such a figure on an apotropaic amulet in the collection of Dumbarton Oaks made in the 4th–5th century from cast bronze, (Inv. 50.15, 4th-5th century AD, **figure 43**). This identifies itself as the 'seal of the living God' (Ross 1962:60). Although it is not the product of a state, this image-type is clearly related to an imperial *adventus*, the triumphant emperor on horseback, returning home after campaign, accompanied by Nike, goddess of Victory. We can see such an *adventus* on the medallion of the Byzantine emperor Justinian (527-565, **figure 55**); but on the amulet, where we might expect the goddess of Victory, there is an angel; and the mounted figure is trampling a prostrate animal, aiming a lance at her back.[7] The amulet has combined an *adventus* with another kind of image, the emperor trampling his enemies. We can see this kind of image on the gold coins of Constantine the Great, (326-327, **figure 56**). Over time, and particularly under Latin rule of the Levant, this imagery evolved to become more explicitly Christian, from the Holy Warrior into the Rider Saint (Walter 2003), a class of saints that includes, among others, Saint George and Saint Demetrius. Constantine the Great, who is venerated in the Greek Orthodox Church, is himself a minor member of this group, but his depiction is rare, a few images in some marginal psalters notwithstanding (Walter 2006:63). The image of Saint George is now familiar in Northern Europe, but it was not until the close of the 11th century that these Rider Saints were brought back to Germany, France and England, following the First Crusade (1095-1099), and their depiction remains

[7] I write 'her' as I believe that this figure is probably Gylou, a daemon who caused still-birth and inflicted a variety of particularly female problems on her victims, and who is associated with Lilith, and who features prominently in the apocryphal text the *Testament of Solomon* (trans. Conybeare 1898).

rare until after that point, and is clearly reliant on Eastern tropes. The Rider Saint iconography evolved in the East under Latin occupation, in the fusion of Eastern and Western styles, a product of Crusader Art (Lapina 2009; Folda 2008; 2004; Kitzinger 1976). One such product of this fusion of images is the icon of *Saint George and the Youth of Mytilene* now in the British Museum (Palestine/Israel, c.1250, **figure 57**); and we can see the same fusion in the seal of Alexios Komnenos Angelos, which shows Saint George on horseback (**figure 45**), and, of course, the seals of Baldwin II, in which the Emperor himself assumes some of the trappings of the Rider Saint (**46, 47, 48, 49**).

My feeling that there was a connection between the *Constantine* and these Eastern images stimulated an extensive image search using the iconographic library of the Warburg Institute in London. This produced the thirteenth century seals and the icon described above, and drew these to my attention.

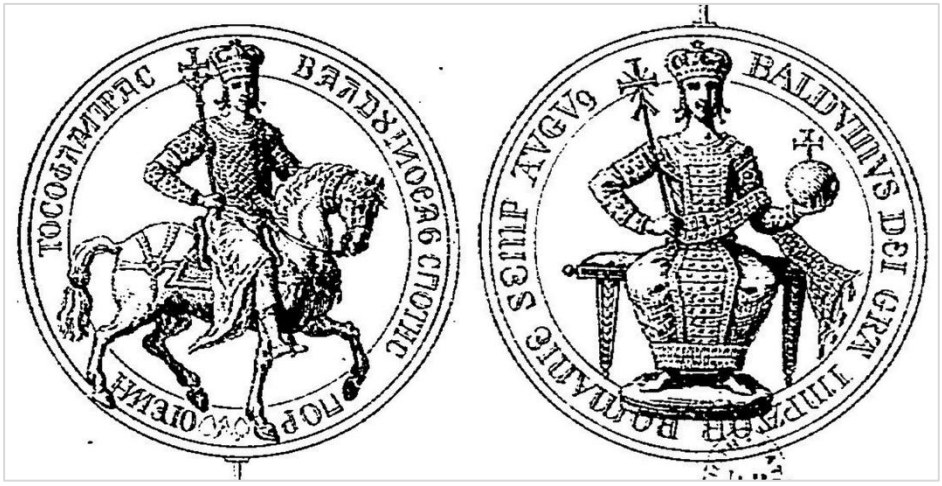
The first argument for a connection between the imagery of Baldwin and the medal in the Duke of Berry's collection is simple likeness: in particular, the degraded lead seal, with its curious open-palmed 'grip', (**figure 47**) and the lost gold seal (**figure 49**) closely resemble the medal.

For this argument to stand, it is necessary to demonstrate that there are no other widely circulating images that resemble the medal as closely. Reference to large digitised image databases of national collections, searching for images of mounted saints and Constantine, establishes this, (see the Appendix for details of the image search, page 212). This is a cautious measure, as the existing literature emphasises the uniqueness of the image as a cornerstone of arguments concerning attribution, for instance M. Jones (1979b:38). Nevertheless, these searches produced no widely circulating images in Northern Europe of this kind prior to 1402.

The argument for a connection is strengthened by circumstantial factors. The first of these is the common situation of Constantinople in the early fifteenth and mid-thirteenth centuries, and its position of supplication relative to the French court: Baldwin II was in the same parlous position as Manuel II at the time that he made his embassy. It is known that both men sent holy relics from Constantinople to Paris, and in particular presented gifts of the True Cross.

Both men sought to instigate crusade (T. Jones 2011:30; Gaposchkin 2008:230-39; Bury 1911-36:7,368-79; Barker 1969:479-81; Morand 1790:8).

Of course, for there to be a direct connection between Baldwin's seal and the *Constantine*, it is necessary to place one of the seals in Paris at the time that the medal was made. At a circumstantial level, this is easily done, because Baldwin corresponded with French rulers, and also used his seals when he was in Northern France. But we can go further than this, and place the lost gold seal in the heart of the Valois court, in its most sacred building.



Etching of a *Seal of Baldwin II,* from Morand, S-J. (1790:plate following 68)

The church of *Sainte-Chapelle* in Paris was built by the Duke of Berry's forebear, Saint Louis, King Louis IX, to house relics sent from Constantinople to Paris by Baldwin II. Although the treasury was violently dispersed during the French Revolution (1789-1799) and many of its artefacts were destroyed, Sauveur-Jérôme Morand's *Histoire de la Sainte-Chapelle*, published in 1790, preserves the text of the letter and an etching of its seal (**figure 49** and above), dated Sainte-Germain-en-Laie 1249, that was once kept in this building (67-68, the text is transcribed in the Appendix to the same, p.8).

This letter, from Baldwin II to King Louis, describes the concession of a number of relics as redemption for certain emergency loans taken out '*pro urgenti necessitate Imperii Constantinopolitani*' (for the urgent necessity of the Empire of Constantinople). The relics are impressive, among them: the upper

part of the head of St. John the Baptist; the heads of Sts. Blaise, Clement and Simeon; a portion of the stone of the Holy Sepulchre; milk of the Virgin Mary; blood of Christ. Top of the list, however, are the '*sacro-sanctam spineam coronam Domini, & magnam portionem vivificæ crucis Christi*' (the Lord's sacred Crown of Thorns, and a large portion of the life-giving Cross of Christ). All of these relics, once '*in Constantinopolitanâ urbe venerabiliter collocatas*' (reverently placed in the city of Constantinople), were removed and consigned to Sainte-Chapelle. Although the letter was issued in 1249 it is very likely that the objects were in the possession of the French king substantially before that date; their significance is evident from their display in *La Grande Châsse*, a prominent piece of display furniture, behind the High Altar of *Sainte-Chapelle* (Heatherington 2006:199-202). The document to which this seal was attached was, therefore, highly significant for the Valois court, and was deeply associated with their status as holy and legitimate rulers, and their association with the cause of Eastern Christianity.

Finally, the existing literature on the Berry medals observes that the title given to Constantine the Great on the medal itself is quite unlike the titles that were commonly used in the West (i.e. Weiss 1963:138). There are, however, strong correspondences between the epigraphy on the *Constantine* and Baldwin's title as it is given in this letter and on his seals (for Baldwin's epigraphy, Morand 1790:67-68 and Appendix:8), and this is further evidence that the seal was consulted at the time of the medal's facture:

> Seal: BALDVINVS DEI GRATIA IMPERATOR ROMANIE SEMPER AVGVSTVS (Baldwin by the grace of God, Emperor of the Romans and forever Augustus)
>
> Letter: BALDUINUS Dei gratiâ fidelissimus in Christo imperator à deo coronatus, Romaniæ moderator & semper Augustus (Baldwin most faithful in Christ, emperor crowned by God, ruler of the Romans and forever Augustus)
>
> Medal: + CONSTANTINVS IN XPO DEO FIDELIS IMPERATOR ET MODERATOR ROMANORVM SEMPER AVGVSTVS (Constantine, faithful in Christ our God, emperor and ruler of the Romans and forever Augustus)

This then is the argument that the *Constantine* is dependent on Baldwin's seal imagery: there are similarities of composition, the position of the horses' legs, the distinctly peculiar position of the riders' left hand, and – in the case of the degraded lead seal, the light, open-palmed and single-handed grip on the reins. Once the document to which Baldwin's gold seal is appended is considered, we can find a suggestively similar title to that used on the medal. This document and its seal can be placed in the heart of the Valois court at the time of the visit of Manuel II to France.

More circumstantially it is clear that the principal actors of the Valois court had a keen interest in maintaining their image as holy warriors, for which Baldwin II and, more so, his '*consanguineo*' King Louis IX form the prototype; evidence of this can be found in the circulation of the title to the Latin Empire long after Baldwin lost any temporal grip on the city of Constantinople.

Following the general direction set out initially by Lavin (1993) and pursued by Tanja Jones (2011), it is suggested here that the early art medal owes a debt to a direct stimulus associated with the cause of Eastern Christianity. This concords with T. Jones' view that the *Constantine* is imbued with a sense of holy militarism, and that this would have been intelligible and useful in the context of the Valois court. The point of departure here is to propose a specific precedent for that connection: the seals of Baldwin II.

Of course, this is useful knowledge in the context of numismatic study, but for the present research it is more pertinent to consider how the seal-like nature of this medal may have worked.

Sealing is one of the most ancient technologies for preserving presence (Duistermaat 2010). Many seals employ imagery that implies the binding of a soul into the material of the seal itself. If we consider that a seal gives enduring ascent to the contents of a document, the platting of the soul of the person with the body of the wax can be understood. By implication and by function, seals have an intimacy with their author. This intimacy is explicit in their use: in day-to-day sealing practices, where wax is used, seal stones and seal rings would need to be licked before being used, with the user's saliva working as a release agent between the wax and the seal stamp (Platt 2007; 2006). Metal

seals are made in a different manner and by skilled craftspeople; nevertheless, the intimacy and confusion of body, identity and object in sealing practices is carried over by implication into metal sealing. This belief can be read in the text of Baldwin's letter to King Louis (Morand 1790:67-68 and Appendix:8):

> In cujus rei testimonium, & perpetuam firmitatem nos signavimus præsentes letteras nostro signo imperiali, & bullavimus nostrâ bullâ aureâ. (In witness whereof, and to be perpetually present, we have signed our imperial signature, and sealed our own golden bull)

It is surely significant that a gold seal of Baldwin II was preserved in *Sainte-Chapelle*, and that imagery from his seals appears to be repeated on the Cross-focused medal of *Constantine* that was made for the Valois prince, the Duke of Berry; and moreover that the bull and the original medal as it is described in the inventories are also made from sheets of the same material: gold. The *Constantine* is an image of a seal, the indexical binding of event and personality in order to render the image of the emperor 'perpetually present'. This inward nature is reflected in the composition of the object, and its curious trap-like nature with its charged interior.

5.3 The *Constantine* as a Component in a Larger System

The existing literature makes the very reasonable case that the medal of *Constantine* was made in response to the visit of Manuel II, and in some way, that it flatters the interests of both the visiting emperor and the Duke of Berry himself; however, with the exception of Tanja Jones' recent work, attempts at reading the medal have focussed on trying to ascribe a particular fixed identity to the *Constantine* as though he has an analogue, either among the Byzantine retinue, or in the French court. These endeavours use the illuminated works of the Limbourg Brothers, and in particular the image of the *Meeting of the Magi* (**figure 58**) from their *Très Riches Heures*. This repeats the *Constantine* in the figure of the horseman on the left, and translates the scene of the meeting of the Wise Men from the Holy Land to just outside Paris: *Sainte-Chapelle* and other Parisian buildings can be seen above *Constantine*. There have, therefore,

been various attempts to work out which historical figure is being flattered by having their likeness repeated on the medal.

Although it is possible that the *Meeting of the Magi* records a real encounter between King Charles VI (the Duke of Berry's brother) and Manuel II that took place at Charenton, just outside Paris, on the 3rd June 1400 (Barker 1969:536), exactly which figure is which is extremely uncertain. Lavin sees the horseman on the left as Charles VI (1997:71-72); M. Jones M (1979b:39) argues that this must be Manuel II; but the art historian Lilian Schacherl thinks that this same figure is the Duke of Berry himself (1997:94). A more propitious line of enquiry is pursued by Tanja Jones, who draws our attention back to the medal, and to what we know from documentary evidence (2011:17-49).

The Duke of Berry was an active collector of art objects, and his collection was systematically inventoried, in 1401, 1413 and 1416. Guiffrey published these inventories in two volumes in 1894 and 1896. Each new entry begins with a number and then the word 'Item'. For instance, the inventory for the *Constantine* begins (Guiffrey 1894:72 #199):

> 199. Item, un autre joyau d'or roont, de haulte taille, ouquel est contrefait d'un des costez Constantin à cheval et a escript à l'environ: Constantinus in Christo deo fidelis imperator et moderator Romanorum et semper Augustus, et de l'autre costé a deux femmes, et ou milieu d'icelles un fontainne où il a un arbre, et dedens ledit arbre une croix…

The inventory descriptions generally give an indication of material and shape – '*d'or roont*' (round gold), type of modelling – '*de haulte taille*' (high relief), epigraphy, imagery, and sometimes provenance and value (Guiffrey 1894:72 #199):

> …lequel joyau Monseigneur achata en sa ville de Bourges de Antoine Machin, marchant de Florence demourant à Paris, le IIe jour de novembre l'an mil CCCC et deux, la somme de XIc frans (…which jewel Monseigneur bought in his city of Bourges from Antoine Machin, merchant of Florence living in Paris, on the second day of November, year 1402, for the sum of 1100 francs.)

It is implicit in these ducal inventories that the *Heraclius* and *Constantine* form a pair. They are adjacent entries, and the first entry, the *Constantine*, gives provenance, purchased from 'Antoine Machin', and the second does not. It can be inferred that the two were obtained at the same time and from the same source. Immediately following are two further entries that describe the gold copies made after these objects, once they had entered the duke's collection (73 #201-202). Of course, the idea that these two objects are intimately related is supported by the similarity of scale, appearance and subject matter of the two surviving objects.

Further than this, the evidence of the inventories suggests that they were part of a larger group of objects that were thought of as forming a contiguous set. The two medals are the third and fourth entries in a section titled: '*PETIS JOYAULX D'OR ACHATEZ PAR MONDIT SEIGNEUR*', (small gold jewels purchased by Monseigneur). The final line of the *Heraclius* entry reads: '*Ces IIII parties acolées sont ainsi declairées ou CLI^e^ et CLII^e^ fueillez dudit livre*' – (these four collected objects are thus described on the 51st and 52nd leaves of this book); implicitly, this describes the *Constantine* and the *Heraclius* as well as the two preceding entries, in other words the four objects numbered in the inventories from #197 – 200. Unfortunately, the inventory descriptions are all that survive from the first two medals, of *Tiberius* (197) and *Augustus* (198), both of which were obtained from 'Michiel de Paxi' (71-72). Nevertheless, it is clear that the 1413 inventory describes a contiguous set of four images of Roman emperors, the *Constantine* and the *Heraclius* coming from one source, and the *Tiberius* and the *Augustus* coming from another. These objects are described as being similarly wrought, being hollow gold objects ringed with stones and pearls.

Also listed in this inventory are two other objects that are suggestively similar in description and subject, but that are not identified as being part of the same bracketed group, a 'large coin' of Julius Caesar, ringed with sapphires and pearls (70 #195), and 'a large gold plaque' with an image of Philip the Arab (the emperor Marcus Julius Philippus) with his hands in an attitude of prayer, looking up at the sky towards the face of God. On the others side of this object is '*un…*

ymaige de Nostre Dame enlevé, tenant son enfant' (an image of Our Lady raised up, holding her child) (28 #55).

That is the condition of the collection in 1413. However, in the later inventory of 1416 the implicit grouping has changed. The image of Julius Caesar is listed contiguously with *Augustus*, the original *Constantine*, a copy of the *Constantine*, and a gold copy of the *Heraclius* (Guiffrey 1896:227 #s 229-233), the original *Heraclius* and the Tiberius medal being listed separately as among a number of objects intended for the heirs of Jean de Montaigu (T. Jones 2011:64, footnote 119).

In addition to these images of historical figures, the 1416 inventory describes a further medal that we might consider alongside these objects. This shows the Duke's own image on one face, and on the other, the image of the Virgin Mary holding her child under a canopy carried by four angels (Guiffrey 1896:227 #234). The obverse of this medal is the probable survival now in Germany (**figure 52**, Staatliche Museeun zu Berlin, Franco-Flemish copy c.1415).

An active collection changes over time. It is likely that the Duke was aware of Petrarch's interest in the moral value of coin portraits. The Italian humanist visited Paris twice, once praising Jean's grandfather, the first Valois king, as a 'New Charlemagne', making his second visit to Paris in 1360, to Jean's father, as part of a diplomatic tour that was intended to instigate crusade (T. Jones 2011:42). Like the portraits of the Caesars given in Petrarch's account in chapter two, this collection can be seen to have an aspirational quality. This reading is greatly strengthened by the presence of the Duke's own image. The collection of images of the emperors appears to be a construction of an aspirational school of peers, for whom the Duke should make himself worthy, or in Petrarch's words, 'who ought to serve him as a model'. Thus the collection is not so much commemorative as it is prospective, more concerned with the Duke's own future than with celebrating the Imperial past.

This is a speculative reading, made all the more speculative that none of the original objects survive – the best we have are the copies of the *Constantine* and the *Heraclius*, and – perhaps – the reverse of the Duke's own medal; however it is supported by the evidence of the duke's interest in a particular

class of devotional image called the *Ara Coeli* (Altar of Heaven). This depicts an apocryphal vision that occurred to the emperor Augustus on consulting the Tiburtine Sibyl on the day of Christ's birth.

Limbourg Brothers, *Ara Coeli*, 1411-1416, in *Très Riches Heures*

In *Ara Coeli*, the sibyl (above, bottom left) is shown advising the Roman potentate (bottom right) of the arrival of a new king, more powerful than him; she gestures to the sky where the figures of the Virgin and Child appear in majesty, against a ring of flames, on top of a crescent moon. There are *Ara Coeli* in both of the Limbourg's books of hours, the *Très Riches Heures* (**figure 59** and above, f.22r) and *Belles Heures* (**figure 60**, f.26v). As the prominent art historian Millard Meiss describes, the Duke was the most prominent patron in Northern France of this rather rare image, which appears in several of his illuminated books. It is thought that the Duke's fondness was partly stimulated by the opportunity that it presented to inveigle himself into the scene, by association. It was common practice for patrons to have the text of a prayer to the Virgin, *O Intemerata*, illuminated with the figure of the kneeling donor. By having this prayer illuminated with an image of Augustus' vision, because the image of Augustus appears in the space that would normally be reserved for the patron, the kneeling Augustus becomes the Duke's avatar (Meiss 1974:f26v; Meiss and Longnon 1969:19/f.22r).

Turning our attention back to the medals in the Duke's collection, the inventory description of the Augustus medal gives the legend on the obverse as: '*Manus ab integro seculorum nascitur ordo'* (The great order of the ages is born afresh').[8] This is the fifth verse of Virgil's Fourth *Ecologue*, recording the utterance of the Tiburtine Sibyl at the time of Augustus' meeting, which was understood throughout the medieval period as a prophecy of the coming of Christ and the Golden Age of Christianity (T. Jones 2011:39-40).

It will be remembered that the surviving obverse of his own portrait medal shows the Virgin and Child under a canopy supported by four angels, (Guiffrey 1896:227, **figure 52**). The scene lacks the radiant sun and the crescent moon, but the position of the group on top of a crenelated architectural dais implies an elevated position.

I want to conclude by imagining this collection of objects as though they are laid out before the viewer, no longer inventory descriptions but material things. We can imagine how they could be moved around, turned over and handled. In this way, the Virgin and Child could be paired with the image of Augustus on one of the other medallions to *create* an *Ara Coeli*; and then, were the devotional medal turned over, the '*ymage, fait à la semblance de Monseigneur*', the Duke himself, would become paired with the Emperor. This possibility, which is proposed by Tanja Jones (2011:47-48), achieves exactly the same layered pairing as can be seen in *Ara Coeli* of the *Très Riches Heures* (**figure 59**, f.22r) and *Belles Heures* (**figure 60**, f.26v). Therefore, the books of hours that the Duke commissioned provide a precedent for his association with Augustus, and support the idea that the medals are intended as a Petrarchan education, a wardrobe of worthy souls for the Duke's assumption. More importantly to the present argument, this speculation supports the idea that the *Constantine* is intended to be a device for *making* rather than conveying meaning: in other words, it is not intended to have one denoted meaning: it is an open object from which, as it is handled and paired with other things, new meanings cleave, as though from its centre, from within.

[8] As Guiffrey observes in a footnote, '*Il faut évidemment lire: Magnus*' (72 #198) – the inventories contain a spelling mistake.

Although the image of the Duke no longer survives, the inventories make plain that the Duke's own image really is a portrait: to borrow from the language of Baldwin's letter, this direct correspondence causes the Duke 'to be perpetually present'. By contrast, the other images are available for imaginative investment.

5.4 Conclusion

The broader findings of this chapter are built on the discovery that the iconography of the *Constantine* is dependent on the seal imagery of Baldwin II. This makes it possible to understand the iconography of the medal not as a rational and denoted correspondence between sign and referent, but rather as a more open and prospective layering of different identities: the historical figures of Baldwin and Constantine, and a broader sense of martial sanctity. These are brought into the same frame and are made present through the material iconicity of the seal-like object.

It seems significant that this object derives from a seal, as it was so influential on the early Italian medal and sealing was the dominant technology for asserting presence and ascent. In sealing, an event of synchronic identity is sutured to an essential identity, to render its subject, in the language of Baldwin's letter, 'perpetually present': the seal binds soul and body, like the movement between the two faces of a portrait medal. It is a benign trap for the self. Its movement of inwardness draws the act of depiction and ascent into a diachronic temporal frame. We can see this inwardness built into the composition of the medal, which folds in on itself, drawing identities into a contiguous space in a new and constructive act.

This chapter has been rather speculative in several ways. Like all attempts to understand the medals of the Duke of Berry, it relies on imagining what the original objects would be like, and then imagining them in the ecology of their original collection. In this way the surviving fragments present a particularly fraught interpretative problem. Nevertheless, there are material traces that survive and that we can see and hold. Considered together with the inventories and the Limbourg's Books of Hours, we can defend the broader idea that the

medal was intended to function as part of a larger speculative system, a collection of surfaces from which content is actively constructed through practice and play. In this way, the medal is a tool for thinking with, and the mental and the material can be seen to interpenetrate, just as the seal draws body and soul together.

The penultimate chapter takes us back to more concrete territory, and the present day.

6. Craft in Practice: David Pye and Making

6.0 Introduction

This research came from the needs of practice. It was stimulated by a personal feeling of creative discomfort at the apparent (and somewhat general) choice between an inward and intellectual pursuit of art and an outward and material pursuit of craft. One of the motivations for fine art's cultural cross-dressing, described in chapter three, is an attempt to escape exactly such restrictive dualisms of author and audience, content and material. This desire is symptomatic of a broader reconsideration of dualist ontologies, such as mind / body, subject / object, human / machine.

This reconsideration may be engendered by tensions that are endogenous to the field of material practice, but it gains fresh impetus through the rapidly changing nature of society and technology. Distributed and collective modes of authorship have accelerated the exchange of knowledge and information. There is an apparent weightlessness to much modern digital experience. Underneath the glistening blue screen however lies a network of solidly material infrastructure, built from finite mineral resources. These minerals belong to a wholly different sense of gravity and time. This is one particular relation of the virtual and the material, of idea and substance, and one of the reasons for a renewed interest in the way in which the virtual and the material can be seen to relate and interpenetrate. The same concerns can be seen, more broadly, in the 'material turn' of the humanities, and its attention to the resistance and flow of the material world. Because craftspeople have palpable ability in navigating the affordances of the world of stuff, craft practice has been treated as an object for instruction, paradigmatic of aptitude in negotiating the new affordances and ambiguities of this very interstitial world. At the same time, of course, craft practice has also evolved, to embrace rapid prototyping and digital design. In this respect, craft is both test-bed and guide, and has a contemporary relevance and instructive power well beyond its traditional 'ghetto of technique' (Adamson 2007:71).

We have seen that the art medal is drawn across the material cultural fold, that it is subject to different schools of interpretation, and that the art medal is a productive field, therefore, for thinking about creative identity. But we have also seen that the 'escape hatch' mentality promoted by Adamson is limited in that it necessarily succumbs to the dominant logic of fine art's zone of free practice, in which disembodied ideas remain pre-eminent. The contrasting example of Hilliard's medal of *Elizabeth I* shows the extent to which denoted meaning and making may be platted together and mutually effective; and the *Constantine* shows how a medal functions as a material surface to draw disparate content together, and to endow it with the necessary valence to function as a practical tool for future creation. In these examples, material and content are intimately and mutually effective.

The example of art medals, and in particular their dominant mode of interpretation, the connoisseurship of intersubjectivity, prompted the theoretical work of the fourth chapter. This develops a theory of experience, the generation of a diffuse surface of experience within creation, as a weaving movement between alterity and mimesis. This work is a contribution to the recent and on-going interrogation of surface. We have seen that Benjamin's work on photography presents a cultural form of his larger philosophical project; in this final chapter, the movement is the other way, from theory to culture, and from culture to practice. This chapter considers the relation of content and material from a technical perspective. It looks at how making is negotiated through systems of embodied decision-making and material. It takes as its principal object a Brazilian rosewood dish approximately 42 cm long, made by the British craftsman David Pye (1980), as an exemplary surface of modern craft (**figure 61**). Most academic discussions of surface present an aesthetics of reception; this final chapter will propose a practical or productive analysis of the same phenomenon. In other words, it considers what is actually happening in craft's awkward ghetto, at what happens when we make. It looks at one instance in which the theoretical observations of chapter four can be found to be true, repeatable, and useful.

6.1 Making

One example of the academic uses to which craft is put is Richard Sennett's book *The Craftsman* (2009). In this, the author advocates for craft as a paradigm for the self-critical merging of subject and world, fit for application in a range of contexts, from town planning to coding, architecture and politics. His book proposes a critical mapping of the craftsperson's openness to their material, their haptic mode of thought, onto a new social polity, as an image of hope and progress. This book is both radical and old-fashioned. It proposes new ways of doing things, but is shot through with a kind of Arts and Crafts romance, a belief in the inherent goodness of skilled and honest labour.

Ingold provides a more interesting example. Largely avoiding any discussion of craft as a cultural or social entity, his book *Making* (2013) is more pragmatic, and more rewarding for being more precise. Near the start of his argument, he considers two different modes of perception, the optical and, again, the haptic. The optical mode sees the end before it is reached, like an object on the horizon that is approached. This mode of perception structures human creativity as the 'novelty of determinate ends conceived in advance'. This is contrasted with a haptic mode, the 'improvisatory creativity of labour' (20). Our epistemology, he argues, is dominated by a project-orientated idea of making. The maker begins with an idea in mind, and with a supply of material, given by nature. The project is complete once the material has assumed the form conceived in its maker's mind. This is a theory of making as the bringing together of form and matter. It has a name, 'hylomorphism', from the Greek *hyle* (matter) and *morphe* (form). Ingold's intention is to explore a radically different way to understand making, one more attuned to a haptic mode of perception, to 'think of making, instead, as a process of growth' (21). This differs from project-orientated thinking in two crucial ways. The first is that the maker is continuous with the world – there is no way that an idea can be formed *in advance* of material. The second is that materials are not passive. Everything is in a process of continual movement, of growth and flux.

It is easy to imagine the liveliness of wood, because a tree can be seen to grow in the course of a human life, and wood to age. It is not surprising that

people object to the trees in their towns or cities being felled – we have an affinity with wood because it grows and changes, like we do, and at a rate that we can see and understand (see, for instance, Halliday 2018 on the recent Sheffield city tree felling protests, or Böhme 2017:48 on the similarity of trees and faces). It is perhaps harder to accommodate this idea in relation to more durable material, like marble; but marble is metamorphic too. It is laid down by progressive deposition of mineral and organic particles, and then recrystallized under pressure, to become the adamant substance that it is. It may meet its Michelangelo, and it is at this point that it is taken into culture's fold. But eventually it will be abraded and reformed into some other substance. Marble is in flux, but not alive. It has properties but no wishes of its own. These properties change over time. It is myopic to separate the form from the matter and to ignore its other states of being. But this is precisely what project orientated thinking does: it values the sculpture but not the stone. Matter, in this view, is a mere supplement to form. It is against this view, hegemonic in Western humanism, that Ingold proposes his idea of making as growth.

Ingold's work is deeply persuasive. His method is anthropological phenomenology: his work on making is informed by various practical workshops in which things are made, together with his students, sometimes under expert instruction, and he draws conclusions from his experience. He is not a dogmatic author, but he can be abstract, and his brief attempt at, for instance, basket weaving (22-24), instructive though it may be for his theoretical project, is of a rather different status to a lifetime's practice. If we want to understand how (and whether) his ideas play out in practice, we need to find other examples. There are not many authors who can claim to write from the privileged position of being really expert at the things they make, but one such is the British craftsman David Pye. Ingold mentions Pye twice in his work on *Making*, but in relation to Pye's writing, and not the objects of his craft (29,62).

6.2 David Pye, in Theory

Pye was a furniture designer and teacher, who worked at the Royal College of Art from 1949 until his retirement as Professor of Furniture Design in 1974.

He is known today for his theoretical work on design (1964) and, in particular, on craftsmanship (1968). He is also known for a series of accomplished bowls, carved from wood by means of a machine of his invention called a *Fluting Engine*, a complex tool by which a hook blade, a kind of gouge, may be directed by a lever, to cut the distinctive flutes that characterise his bowls – its operation will be described later. The engine was invented sometime between 1949 and 1950. Many of Pye's bowls are now in major collections, including the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Museum of Art and Design (New York), as well as specialist collections like the Centre for Art in Wood (Philadelphia, USA). The Brazilian rosewood dish that is the focus of this chapter is in the collection of the Crafts Council, London (W43 see Crafts Council: undated; Crafts Council 1986:63 **figure 61** and below); the characteristic flutes can be clearly seen on this object. Pye died in 1993.

David Pye *Dish*, 1980, 420mm long, Brazilian rosewood

Pye's legacy is international, but he is particularly important in a British context because of his disenchanting assessment of the Arts and Crafts movement: his 'critique of Ruskin sits within the historiography of modern craft like a depth charge, exploding the logic of the craft movement right at its spiritual centre' (Adamson 2013:194); he is one of the few post-war British craft theorists of note. Outside of craft historiography, his main contribution stems

from his phlegmatic brevity and pragmatic focus. He is a very concrete thinker. Definitions of apparently simple concepts such as 'skill' or 'craft' are hard to agree. Pye recognised that these terms are over-freighted with historical baggage, and proposed new technical terms that now serve other authors well. Thus Adamson begins his chapter on skill with a discussion of Pye's terminology (2007:69-75), and Pye is quoted in the title of a chapter on the same subject, in Christopher Frayling's book *On Craft*, '*Skill – a word to start an argument*', before providing the meat of Frayling's argument (Frayling 2011:63-82).

Choosing to use the words 'craft' and 'skill' as little as possible, the first of Pye's precise alternatives is 'the workmanship of risk', meaning facture that involves dexterity and care. This is contrasted with 'the workmanship of certainty', in which making is entirely jigged or guided (Pye 1968:4-12). Risk and certainty are relative rather than absolute terms. They describe how things are made. They do not describe culture or interpretation; neither do they describe a 'good' way of doing something or a 'bad' way. For this reason, they can be employed with clarity, unlike their over-burdened near-synonyms, 'hand-made' and 'manufactured', words that come freighted with a degree of prejudice.

Pye proposed two further terms to describe the desired outcome of making, 'rough workmanship' and 'regulated workmanship' (1968:13-19). Regulated workmanship is the accurate disposal of design, 'conveyed… by drawings and by specification' (21), generally aided by jigs or guides. Its aim is to realise an idea with the minimum of tolerance, like a peg that has been cut to fit its hole exactly. By contrast, rough workmanship is an approximation. Again, these two terms are relative, and again, they are neither 'good' nor 'bad'. They simply describe an intended attitude to instruction.

In its invocation of design, Pye's idea of regulated workmanship subscribes to the hylomorphic model of the creative project. Design is prior to making: form orders matter. Pye is quite clear on this point. It is expressed in the title of *Workmanship*'s opening chapter: 'Design proposes. Workmanship disposes' (1-3). To adapt Ingold's phrase, design is 'a determinate end conceived in advance'; we are dealing here with an optical mode of perception. Regulated workmanship is the process by which the design vision is disposed, the means

by which matter assumes its form. But rather than being the end of the conversation, this rather lapidary division of labour into proposal and disposal is what opens the book: what follows is a rare attempt to understand the present tense of making, and how this stands in relation to the future tense of design. The crucial point is that workmanship indeed *cannot* be conveyed by words and by drawing, in advance. It is for this reason that it merits its own book.

It is commonplace to consider regulation in making as an aspirational quality, and its attainment as a hallmark of probity. In 1973 the design historian Reyner Banham spoke at the inauguration of the Crafts Advisory Committee, which later became the Crafts Council, the group that owns the rosewood dish. This lecture is informed by Pye's ideas, (indeed, it begins with a lengthy reference to his work), and it deals with regulation, manufacture and craft. In particular, Banham describes his early training as an aeronautical engineer, and the standard apprentice exercise (Banham [1973]2008:139):

> …of making a square piece of metal which would fit, no argument, in a square hole cut in another piece of metal. It had to fit without jamming anywhere and without showing daylight anywhere around its perimeter when it was held up to the light. Now there is only one way of doing that. A machine cannot do it. Only the human hand and eye can produce a fit of that degree of fineness…

In 1973, 'half-a-thou', half a thousandth of an inch, was considered the limit of dextrous practice. This is a very small unit, less than 0.03 of a millimetre. But in 2018, with the new horizon of nanoengineering, the new standard is the nanometre, a unit of measurement that is 25,400 times smaller. This degree of fineness is not achieved by hand. It would be wrong, however, to think that the hand has lost its measure as the ultimate arbiter of 'fit', for two reasons. Firstly, all equipment owes its existence to other tools, and, genealogically speaking, to tools that were indeed once made by hand. For this reason the hand can be regarded as the 'first' technical device: it is the earliest tool and the font of all that followed. This status is honorific. More pragmatically, however, when we think about 'fit', what we generally need is just the right amount of tolerance, not absolute precision, and tolerance is judged by hand, not eye. Most

manufacture operates within broad tolerances: as Banham comments, machine tools 'shed their accuracy with time, and furthermore, they must be not be made all that accurate in the first place' (140). Imagine Banham's metal peg: were the peg made to fit the hole, not to half-a-though but *exactly* to the atom, it would not be possible either to insert it, or, *mirabile dictu*, once inserted, to remove. If a machine tool were made along these same lines, its parts would jam, and it would be no use to anyone. Banham articulates the idea that that all making happens in a system of compromise, one that is ultimately governed by the hand. It might be made in a different context, but, albeit at a distance of half a century, this is the same point that Ingold makes.

Pye's book on *Workmanship* is widely celebrated. Its strength is that it is pragmatically focussed on immediate interactions between hand, tool and material, and the kinds of effects that result from different kinds of making. But if this book is read in isolation, the reader is left with a partial picture. His earlier work on design has been of late much less regarded. It might be thought that *The Nature of Design* (1964) would concentrate on how drawings and specifications might be given to the workman. The reader is disabused of this notion from the start (1964:7):

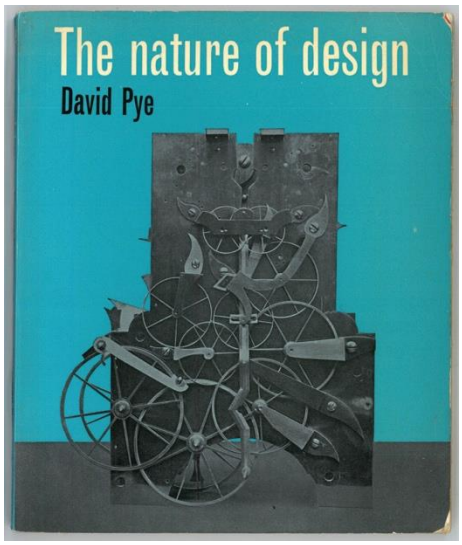
> What is design?... Most of the nonsense probably starts at the point where people begin talking about function as though it were something objective: something of which it could be said that it belonged to a thing.

If the function of the object does not belong to it, then how might it be prescribed by design? The big idea in this strangely pious book is that the world – perhaps creation – should be regarded as a system through which energy flows. Because we cannot alter the laws of physics, every decision in this system is a compromise (1964:15):

> When you put energy into a system you can never choose what kind of changes shall take place and what kind of results shall remain. God has already decided those things. All you can do, and that only within limits, is to regulate the amounts of the various changes. This you do by *design*, which is the business of ensuring that at least you get the change you want along with all

> the others which you don't such as heat, noise, wear and the rest. It is as though the world operated on the principle of 'truck'. If you want some of this then you must take some of that as well, even if you do not want it.

Pye was critical of design methods that considered objects separately rather than as components in a larger system. The book is full of verbal and photographic images of systems of different scales. A wedge, for example, is a 'one component system' (22). On the cover of my edition, there is a photograph of a regulator clock (Benjamin Vulliamy, c1780 **figure 62**, below). Later on, Pye



David Pye, *The Nature of Design*, 1972 edition.

describes Henry Maudslay's slide-rest and lead-screw, (c1810), 'one of the most important determining systems and the parent of innumerable others' (54), an ancestor tool for the modern machine mill. All of these particular systems form their own internal economy, but in turn are part of a wider economy that contains all things (1964:31):

> We think of a device as a self-contained system, but of course no system is self-contained. Every device is a subsidiary part of a more extended system (which must contain among its other components, man)

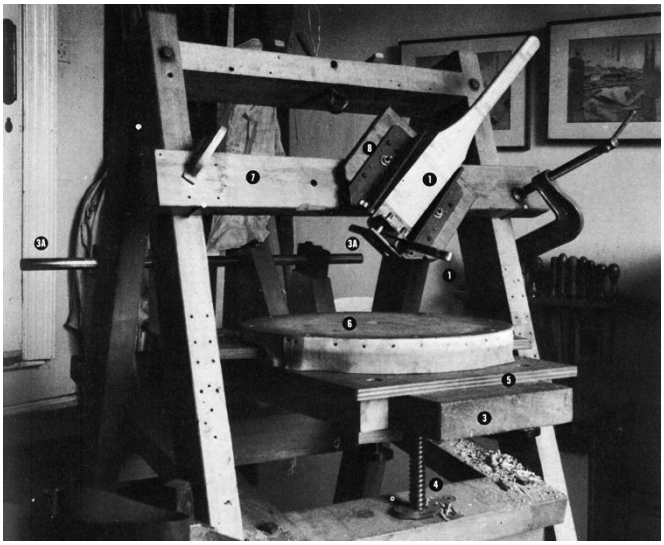
If we consider Pye's recognition of 'truck' and his belief that the operative and the designer are both part of a dynamic system of flow, we might need to

read his work on *Workmanship* in a different light. Perhaps the division: 'Design proposes. Workmanship disposes.' must be softened: 'Design hopes to propose. Workmanship tries to dispose.' Indeed, both these books are larded with a strange sense of failure: 'Nothing we design ever really works… The aircraft falls out of the sky or rams the earth full tilt and kills the people. It has to be tended like a new born babe' (1964:10); 'All workmanship is approximation. There are in the world of manufacture, and not only in that of metaphysics, certain Ideas of which the things we make are necessarily imperfect copies' (1968:13).

To summarise, Pye's theoretical contribution is twofold. There is the very well recognised contribution to our technical understanding of making; his categories of free and guided workmanship are still frequently referred to in the literature as precise critical alternatives to ideas of skill. His second contribution is much less well recognised. This is the idea that all creation happens in a system of parts, people and material; and that, at a higher scale than this, each system is nested within a larger economy of materials and energy with a life long after and long before the act of making itself.

6.3 David Pye, in Practice

The advantage of studying Pye is that we can do better than reading his books against each other, and thinking in the space between them. The evidence of Pye's own practice as a craftsman can be used as well. To my knowledge no one has attempted to treat his *Fluting Engine* in this way, but it forms a remarkably well-defined case for testing and developing his ideas. To start with, it is a very good example of a system. Pye describes the operation of the engine in a Crafts Council publication of 1986 (43-49). It is a unique object: when a bowl is turned on a lathe, the craftsperson works around the axis of rotation, and the resultant tool marks are visible like the striations on a vinyl record; Pye's innovation enables the operator to work at 90 degrees to the axis of rotation, and to make bowls where the tool marks radiate in a linear fashion from the centre of the bowl. This can be seen in the surface of the rosewood dish.



David Pye, *Fluting Engine*, 1949-1950, in its 1980's iteration.

An understanding of the engine's operation is essential (**figure 63** and above). The wooden 'blank' from which the bowl is to be carved is fixed to a rather stiff turntable. This can be rotated, as well as raised and lowered. The cutting blade of the *Fluting Engine* is a hook shaped gouge. This is attached by a pivot to an 'A' frame that sits above the turntable. A lever operates this: as this is pulled, the gouge describes an arc towards, and through the wooden blank, carving an elliptical groove from the wood. At the conclusion of each pass, the operator rotates the turntable by a few degrees, and then repeats the process until a whole circle has been turned. The turntable can then be raised slightly, and the operation repeated; this enables the operator to shave successively deep grooves from the blank until the bowl is finished. Without any other adjustment, this would produce a perfectly symmetrical product, but Pye describes how complexity is introduced. The gouge can sit at an angle to the blank, and thereby carve an arc that moves through two axes. Alternatively, an oval turner's chuck can be used so that the movement of the turntable describes an ellipse rather than a circle. All of these processes add something new, and open up new possibilities of form. None of these processes were previously obtainable to wood turners, and the forms would be unachievable, unless carved entirely by hand, like a sculpture.

Pye made at least one other *Fluting Engine*, a smaller horizontal version, adapted for carving patterns on the lids of wooden boxes (Pye 1986:50).

It is likely that the name of Pye's device derives from the *Maudslay Table Engine* (designed 1807), a steam engine that he discusses in his theoretical work (1968:plates 13-14). The word 'engine' has connotations of ingeniousness. It is 'a contrivance consisting of a number of moving parts that work together to produce a desired physical effect' (OED 1993:821). The word compounds ideas of thought, desire, and making. It is hard not to be reminded also of Charles Babbage's nineteenth century computers, the *Difference* (made in 1822) and *Analytical Engines* (proposed in 1837), large copper and brass machines that can perform complex mathematics. Babbage's collaborator the mathematician Ada Lovelace could perhaps see further than the engineer: saying that 'the Analytical Engine weaves algebraic patterns just as the Jacquard loom weaves flowers and leaves,' she intimates a continuity between the fabric of logic and the warp and weft of real cloth (Lovelace in Sikarskie 2016:6; see DeNichola 2016:35-55 and Rosner 2016:189-198 for a contemporary expression of the same contiguity of code and craft). Like Babbage's computers, the *Fluting Engine* is a clever and very physical device, a computational space within which forms are conceived and made. To date, Pye is the only person to have operated his machine. An American craftsman is in the process of making his own copy, a project that is stalled – at the time of writing – at obtaining an oval turner's chuck, a device that regulates the lateral movement of the centre of rotation in lathes and similar devices (Wumkes 2017-2018). For now, Pye's engine still has a unique relationship with him, as the inventor of the tool and as its only user (Pye 1986:43 – this was certainly the case in 1986, and Pye died in 1994).

It is clear from the photographs of the engine that it is a system of interoperating parts. Taking our lead from Pye himself, let us speculate about *his* role as the human component in this system. There are some decisions that must be taken in advance of the equipment being used. The operator must choose a billet of wood, and then roughly shape the bowl with a 'heavy spout-adze' (1986:46). Some artisans, perhaps following a tenet of truth to materials,

might allow the wood to suggest the bowl's shape; Pye confesses that he does not, though of course the size of the billet creates an upper limit for the bowl. Rather than being concerned with the form of the bowl, the object at this stage is to 'show the figure of the wood – the pattern of the grain – to the best advantage, and to avoid defects in it which look unsightly or may weaken the thing to be made' (31).

The gross form of the bowl, its morphology, is determined by the configuration given to the machine. By varying the relative positions of the cutter's pivot and the turntable centre, and by altering the cutter's radius and the angle of the plane through which it moves, a large variation of form is possible. If the oval-turner's chuck is used, then this increases it further. All of these parameters are fixed before the engine is used, and these prescribe a narrow set of potential outcomes. When seen from this vantage, it would seem that Pye the designer 'programmes' his engine; the form is latent in this configuration; the operation of the machine will translate this latent form from the engine to the material.

Even though he was writing in the 1960s, both of Pye's books describe the new technological horizon of numerical control (1968:25; see also 1964:55):

> By numerical control certain designs can be translated (not interpreted) and 'told' directly to a machine tool so that a prototype or tool can be made without any care, judgement or dexterity being exercised at this stage. Ultimately automation may dispense with the operative altogether; but hardly the workman, who will presumably remain indispensible to it somewhere, even if numerical control advances to the point that a set of machines, given a suitable programme, can design and make another without the workman intervening at all.

Pye's work is situated at the cusp of this technological revolution. It is perhaps not surprising that some artists and designers have returned to it as a provocation, possessing as it does the clear register of 'craft' but being mediated by machine, a kind of digital craft *avant la lettre*. In 2011 the American designer Zeke Leonard wrote about this on his blog, and later created his own fluted bowl *Homage to David Pye*, carved using a CNC routing machine (Leonard 2011:online, **figure 64**). A few years later, the British design academic

David Grimshaw made another *Homage to David Pye*, again using CNC technology (Kettle, Brown, Grimshaw, Egan, Cocchiarella 2014: online, **figure 65**). Grimshaw followed this with a more formally complex object, a form that it would not be possible to make using Pye's process, but which nevertheless still quotes from the characteristic internal fluting of Pye's work (Grimshaw undated:online). Leonard describes his homage as 'a craft object', but comments that 'something is lost in this particular amount of remove between the maker and the material. I am used to my interaction with my material being modulated by a saw handle or the butt of a chisel. I am even used to that interaction being filtered through a power tool, a router or a jigsaw… Having that interaction modulated by a computer screen, on the other hand, feels too distant for me.' (2011:online; see Ingold 2017:101-102 for optical touch in touch-screen devices)

Of course, Pye's process was not mediated by a digital screen. Like one of Babbage's computers, it is entirely analogue. But, as Leonard's quotation implies, there is no hard line beyond which the operator no longer receives feedback from their tools – both a chisel and the screen 'modulate' the distance between a maker and the material. If there is no hard line, perhaps we might find Ingold's 'improvisatory creativity of labour' even in modern digital practices? A *prima facie* case for this is made by the extraordinary imagination of new forms in digital architecture and design, many of which are displayed in recent reviews such as *Digital Handmade* (Johnston 2015) and *Postdigital Artisans* (Openshaw 2015). To take one example from these books, of Jerhoen Verhoeven's *Cinderella Table* (2004; Johnston 2015:258-261; Openshaw 2015:263-265): this bold reshaping of an 18th century pattern for an occasional table into something fresh and weird is clearly reliant on the new technology at his disposal. The Victoria and Albert museum acquired the object in 2006. Their website explains that Verhoeven 'wanted to use CAD-CAM as (in his words) a 'new modern craft' because he felt it was 'hiding a craft' within it' (V&A 2016:unpaginated). As early as 1996, the architect Malcolm McCullogh argued that point-and-click graphical user interfaces could form the starting point for a new digital haptics in craft (McCullogh 1996). Advances in manufacturing and

material technology might make something possible that hitherto was not, but, that is not really the point. Put simply, it is not that digital technology 'creates' new shapes, it is that it enables the physical and an imaginary environment for their conception. The potential of new technology has to be discovered, and this happens through a process more like play than planning, and it is in this sense that it is haptic and not optic, (though, again, this is not to imply or require actual concrete touch).

Unlike many of the advances in modern digital manufacture, there is nothing that can be made with the *Fluting Engine* that cannot be made without it: a competent sculptor employing 'the workmanship of risk' could have carved the entirety of Pye's output, freehand. It is unlikely, however, that such a sculptor could have *imagined* these forms without the example of the engine's work. Pye wrote relatively little about his own work, so it is not known how his *Fluting Engine* was conceived, whether he had an idea of a bowl in mind and wanted a tool to make it, or whether the idea of a scraping tool came first, and its application followed. In the late 1940s and early 1950s Pye was deeply concerned with the design and construction of wooden boats (Pye 1950; 1951), having spent five and a half years in the Navy, and prior to this, about a year working for the Port of London (Pye 1986:13). Perhaps he was motivated by the cutting action of a hull through water, the movement of something sharp against a resistant material, and the system by which this could be steered; given the derivation of the word, from the Greek for *steersman*, it seems fitting to describe his practice as 'cybernetic' (OED 1993:580). Indeed, there are some clues in his work that give insight into how Pye conceived his forms. The first of these is that his engine, and so his bowls, became more complex over time: we can see progressive change within his work, and a corresponding complexity to the engine. In 1986, he described adaptations that he had made to the machine over the preceding ten years. One was an adaptation to swing the gouge in a plane diagonal to the turntable, to create spiral flutes. The other was the introduction of the oval turners chuck (1986:46). Before 1976, all of his bowls' depressions were, perforce, circular. At some point between 1976 and 1986, oval forms became possible. The second clue into how Pye developed his forms

is a short comment that he made about the objects of his second smaller *Fluting Engine*. This device is for the engraving of wooden box lids (1986:46):

> The technique for engraving… lids is simply an adaptation of the bowl fluting technique and I developed it about eight or ten years ago. It is far less adaptable than the technique of the Ornamental Turning Lathe [a complex machine tool for carving, for instance, barley twist candlesticks] (though probably much quicker) but it is still capable of producing a surprising variety of patterns – some of them very nasty!

This is an admission of surprise and discovery. The image of Pye the designer 'programming' his engine needs to be modified. He is working with the engine, as much as through it. His iteration of bowls and dishes over four decades of production is a slow improvisation. Rather than projecting his vision of form through the engine and onto the matter of the wood, a broad repertoire of forms can be seen evolving, in repetition and reprise. Thus we can see the broad typology of the rosewood dish that we are concerned with here, repeated in variation, sometimes with handles, sometimes without, and in different kinds of wood. If we return then, to Pye's idea of the 'human component', it is clear that this component is not simply a command centre; the process is one of input as well as output, a kind of experimental play, or slow improvisation.

Another mistake in reading his work as the imposition of a form on matter is to think of each bowl as a discrete unit. A more accurate way of conceiving of the process would be – rather as is the case with Verhoeven, above – as a process of discovering the 'affordances' of the system, (to borrow from the psychologist James Gibson 1979:127-143), of finding out what it can and cannot do, and what works and what does not. This creates a cognitive field, dispersed through the technologies and materials that form the system of making and without which it is to be doubted these new forms would be created. This process of ideation is what is invoked when arts academics direct their students to 'think through making'.

So far the discussion has been limited to the determination of gross form, and the setting up of the machine, the 'programming' – that is to say everything

that happens ‘before’ the making starts – though it should be clear by now that the making process never really starts or stops. It is a continuous endeavour. Let us turn our attention to that part in the process where a blank is in place and the machine is being used. The operator takes up the lever, to which the gouge is attached by a bell-crank, and pulls it down, pushing the gouge through an arc, and shaving a sliver of wood from the blank. The turntable is then rotated by a small degree, and the operation is repeated. Eventually a whole circle is turned, and the bed is fractionally raised, allowing another pass to be made, carving a deeper depression, and so incrementally forming the bowl. Like a lot of manufacturing operations, this is a progressive process. We might think of weaving a rug or coiling a clay vessel. Each stage in the process is determined by the step before. We might think again of a modern process such as rapid prototyping, in which a form is constructed layer by layer, by the fusion of fine particles under the action of a laser. This is also a progressive process, each stage standing on the last, like a kind of sedimentation. Like rapid prototyping, weaving can be very highly automated; the loom might, by numerical control, have its movements ‘told’ to it, so that the rug can be made without any human care. The actions of the machine, and the logic of the process, are still progressive. But while it is running, Pye’s engine has a human component at its heart, and the process is one of input as well as output. As he explains, the *Fluting Engine* is only moderately jigged (1986:46):

> I have never cared to put a dividing plate on the turntable so that all the flutes could be indexed to an equal width. It could be done, but would mean that the inside of the bowl was all regulated. I have preferred the element of freedom introduced by spacing the flutes by eye and hand.

Pye’s language was always precise, and he defined his terms. Regulated workmanship is the accurate disposal of design ‘conveyed… by drawings and by specification’ (1968:21), generally aided by jigs or guides. In spacing the grooves ‘by eye and hand’ he is entering into the progressive operation of the engine, entering its system, and improvising through the process. While the broad shape of the dish and the discovery of pattern belong to a longer duration of

evolution, the fine detail evolves while the dish is carved. This effect is clear on the surface of the rosewood dish. It looks regular, but – and especially once one knows how the engine works – it reveals the evidence of this incremental process, in which each pass of the gouge forms a structuring basis for subsequent judgements and subsequent grooves.

The French philosopher Gilbert Simondon describes this kind of process – for our purposes, coiling a pot, weaving a rug, carving a bowl, or sintering a prototype – as 'transduction' ([1958]1992:297-319). The example that he gives is crystallisation (313):

> This term denotes a process – be it physical, biological, mental or social – in which an activity gradually sets itself in motion, propagating within a given area, through a structuration of the different zones of the area over which it operates. Each region of the structure that is constituted in this way then serves to constitute the next one to such an extent that at the very time this structuration is effected, there is a progressive modification taking place in tandem with it. The simplest image of the transductive process is furnished if one thinks of a crystal, beginning as a tiny seed, which grows and extends itself in all directions in its mother-water. Each layer of molecules that has already been constituted serves as the structuring basis for the layer that is being formed next, and the result is an amplifying reticular structure. The transductive process is thus an individuation in progress.

Simondon was writing in 1958, and until very recently little of his work had been translated into English (Simondon 2017). For this reason, it is rarely cited in the Anglo-Saxon world, though it has been influential to much continental thought, and in particular in relation to his exposure of the 'technological insufficiency of the matter-form model' of ontogenesis (Deleuze and Guattari [1987]2007:408). It is doubtful that Pye knew of his ideas. Simondon was not published in French until 1964, and even then, only partially, the same year as *The Nature of Design* came out in Britain. However, Pye's book on *Workmanship* contains a typically lapidary description of a self-jigging tool, which provides a verbal image of a transductive process, just as much as his rosewood dish provides a concrete example (1968:18):

> …many tools are partly self-jigging. The adze is, for one. The whole secret of using it accurately is that the curved back of the descending adze strikes tangentially on the flat surface left by the previous stroke—which becomes a partial jig—and rides along it so that the new stroke more or less continues the plane of its predecessor.

Simondon is not concerned with making *per se*. He uses crystalisation as a metaphor by which ontogenesis, coming-into-being, can be understood. Like Ingold, (who cites Simondon twice in his book on *Making* 2013:25,29), his project is an attack on previous ways of understanding how objects are thought of as being individual, the failed dualisms of form and matter, mind and body, self and other. In particular, his project is an attack on the hylomorphic model of form and matter, which, in the context of art and design, we can understand as the future tense of design ideation. In relation to Pye's practice we have described two different registers of time, the longer time by which the engine and the broad morphology of the bowls evolved, and the shorter time by which individual pieces are made. In both cases, the process is a progressive structuring in which Pye is not so much projecting his design vision as he is negotiating a set of outcomes from a system full of latent potential. This understanding of Pye's work provides just one example of the way in which the mental can be seen to interpenetrate and, in turns, be penetrated by the material.

In his theoretical work, concentrating by turns on 'design' and 'workmanship', Pye seems to promote the notion that thought, proposal, can be separated from production, disposal; and of course, in practice, this does happen. There are designers who do not make, and there are pattern makers who do not design. Instructions can be issued, in words and diagrams, with a reasonable expectation that something will be made, and that it will bear some conformity to the image in the command. Pye knew this at first hand: he designed for industry. But there are two aspects of Pye's work that are rarely taken into account in considering his theoretical legacy. The first of these is a critical sense of failure, the diminution of 'determinate ends conceived in advance' (1964:10):

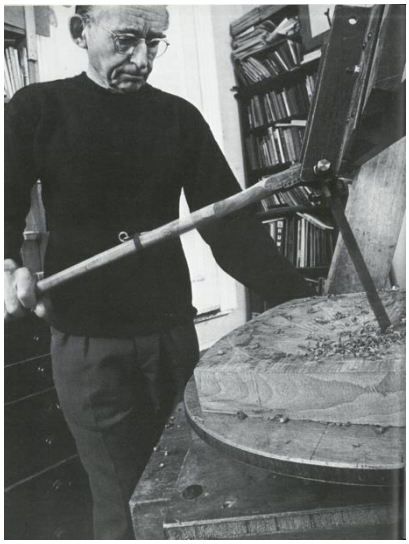
> The concept of function in design, and even the doctrine of functionalism, might be worth a little attention if things ever worked. It is, however, obvious that they do not… Everything we design and make is an improvisation, a lash-up, something inept and provisional. We live like castaways.

The second is his insistence that all action is related. No gesture, no thought, no movement takes place on its own. Everything that is made is contained in a system. The actions of the designer and the workman are restricted to making adjustments within a system of flow, from within it, and as a part of it. His own practice, in which he plays the twin role of designer and workman, forms an excellent illustration of this process.

6.4 Bodily Cognition

Pye's writing is usefully focussed on the pragmatic aspects of making, but it is characterised by a self-effacement that writes his own body out of the picture. His strangely objective, disembodied prose style was developed as a young man during the Second World War, a war spent sat 'behind a desk at the Admiralty drafting reports' (Harrod 1999:201). Consequently, when he does describe his making, it is a little like reading an incident sheet of an event that occurred to someone else.

This detachment belies a lifetime of deep immersion in materials. Pye and Banham belong to a generation for whom an interest in making of any sort, from pottery to precision engineering, necessitated a hands-on familiarity with tools. This is not necessarily true of artists, designers and makers who are studying today. Work can be designed in the friction-free environment of the computer screen. Sculptors may send their work straight to digital print. We can see something of this in the honorific objects of Leonard and Grimshaw, both of whom are interested in CNC processes for craft practice, and whose bowls were designed in CAD. But when we look at photographs of Pye's engine, from a contemporary point of view, it looks heavy, clunky, physical: something that has to be negotiated through the body. Leonard describes the loss of feeling involved in having 'interaction modulated by a computer screen' as opposed to the 'butt of a chisel' (2011:online); but when Pye enters the system of



David Pye operating the Fluting Engine

production that we have been concerned with here, the physical feedback from the engine, the feeling of resistance as the hook gouge carved the wood, must have been substantial (**figure 66** and above). This is concrete touch as opposed to the much-discussed haptic perception – the virtual touch – of recent debate (i.e. Ingold 2017; Bruno 2014).

This is not to suggest that hand-work or machine-work is more material than its modern and digital equivalents, but there is an important difference. Digital technology hides its physicality remarkably well, and it demands less from the bodies of its users. The screen dissolves the hardware behind it. The computer itself might be somewhere in 'the cloud'. There is nothing to remind its user of the copper and glass intestines of the Internet, the massive server farms, or the holes in the ground from which the plumbing of the Internet has been taken. The point is not, therefore, that digital processes are less material – in fact they may be more so. What is significant here is that Pye's engine hides none of its materiality, and moreover, that the engine's operator must have had to contend with this materiality, and indeed, it is only through this contention that thought is formed. To put this in another way, the contents of Pye's objects are immanent to their physical realisation.

This chapter has considered the distributed body of a collection of carved bowls, and the improvisation of form through the engine, a process of extended

and distributed thought. As we have seen, the engine acts as an imaginary device, an extension of the maker's mind. There is evidence to support these conclusions in the record of the objects that Pye made and the few comments that he made about his own work; but I want to end this chapter by continuing this thought in a speculative direction, one that is based on my own experience of making, by imagining myself in Pye's position, operating the engine, pulling the lever and rotating the plate.

This thesis addresses the relation of material and content in the objects of art. We have seen how important the event of art is to its understanding, and how the index of an artist's hand gives access to the artist's quality of personality. The hand in this sense is the artist's unconscious and embodied stylistic knowledge – as Berenson describes, it is most evident in those parts of a painting where an artist is working without conscious intervention, from autographic habit (1920:132-133). The same alchemy is evident every time we sign a contract or a cheque – our signatures are unconscious, bodily and concrete expressions of our unique identity. But very little work is made by hand alone: most artistic labour is modulated though its tools, in the two cases above, a brush and a pen. In this sense, as the connoisseurs understood, the tool is an extension of the hand, and it is through the hand, an aspect of the body, that the imaginary is developed and then realised. In the case of a Renaissance artist we might regard the hand and brush together, therefore, as the location of the artist's embodied stylistic knowledge. Likewise, in the present case, I suggest that it is not just Pye's mind that is extended through the engine, but his body too, and that we should consider his hand and engine together as the location of Pye's own embodied stylistic knowledge, his personal handwriting.

Embodied knowledge is the kind of knowing-how-to-act that describes riding a bike or steering a ship; but it also describes cultural production, as in dancing, figure-skating, drawing and carving a bowl. As the art historian and curator Lionel Lambourne puts it (1986:23):

> Handling a Pye bowl is like being at an ice rink immediately after the performance of a great skater, when we can trace the perfectly calculated, exactly controlled choreography, punctuated by a geometrically perfect 'death spin', judged to a millimetre, the precisely considered effect of the inner and outer edge of the skate leaving a sharply engraved pattern.

This same author has described the 'The unforced evolution of the "handwriting" of his [Pye's] own style' (21). All of these actions are negotiated in the concrete realm, in which actual feeling (literal touch) is required.

This thesis began with a satirical image from contemporary art: David Shrigley's dead clever dog, a joke at the collective overinvestment in the workings of inner-mind. By contrast, we have seen a long tradition of – and resurgent interest in – reading and valuing the skin of art, its expressive face, from which the intelligence of material engagement is inferred. Handwork is not mere proficiency in material manipulation, like 'knitting, or polishing the silver' as Henry Moore put it (1992:137). To engage with materials is to think; but in order to fully realise this we need to rethink thinking. This is the task of N. Katherine Hayles' recent book on 'nonconscious cognition', *Unthought* (2017:9). As she observes, there is a tendency to confuse consciousness and cognition, but whereas the former is rare form of self-awareness possessed by only a small handful of animals, the latter covers a broader category of human and animal thought including non-conscious neurological and bodily processes, and this extends out, as is the case with the blind-man's stick, into objects and other 'complex technical systems' (9).

I am writing this on a relatively complex technical system, a laptop computer: here I have access to years of notes, my own external memory, as well as to the collective memory of the Internet. My biological cognition is extended through the laptop into a whole web of linked technical cognitions. One of the lessons of cybernetics is that machines extend human mental capabilities; but the symbolic nature of coding offers a false paradigm: because we can develop cognitive processes in computer language, we come to think of cognition as a necessarily symbolic computation (Hayles 2017:12). This error is

all the more tempting because it fulfils the logo-centric bias in our knowledge-culture (Barad 2007:132).

Since Malcolm Mcullogh's *Abstracting Craft* made the case for the 'practiced digital hand' in 1996, other authors have argued, from Sennett (2009:24-25) to DeNichola (2016), that computation should be regarded as a craft medium, though which a virtual touch, a haptic visuality, may be extended. In addition, there is a mass of literature that draws parallels between physical making and bitwise manipulation (binary operation) in computing, in particular in relation to cloth manufacture, whether that is in weaving (Carpenter and Mosscrop 2018), or knitting (Rosner 2016:191). These analogies are interesting and useful, but they are misleading if the subject of the analogy is understood to assume the characteristics of its object. In other words, programming *is* like a sort of thinking, but thinking *is not* like a sort of programming, at least, not generally; similarly, bitwise operation *is* like a sort of craft, but craft *is not* like a sort of bitwise operation. The conversations around digital craft need to be developed in two ways. The first is to ask: what kind of computation (or cognition) we are concerned with? The second is to ask: what is lost when the concrete touch of making is replaced with virtual, haptic touch?

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has developed a synthesis of Pye's writing to provide a lens through which to analyse the products of his practice in the context of contemporary debates on creativity. With the advantage of this work, Pye's engine is shown to be an excellent example of a 'complex technical system' for thought. Following Pye's lead in locating the human in the system, this should be considered as the mergence of material, tool and human operator, through which, over time, complex thought is formed, a genuinely cybernetic system, governed by concrete touch, the arbiter of necessary 'fit' or 'truck' (Banham 1973:139; Pye 1964:15). Unlike Leonard's and Grimshaw's honorific reimaginings of this work, Pye's computation is non-symbolic. There is no linguistic or symbolic representation involved in the process; difference and

similarity – meaning – emerges though physical operation, and in this realm, the hand remains preeminent.

7. Summary and Conclusion to the Thesis

7.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the thesis, the conclusion, and the direction for future research.

7.1 Summary

This summary contains internal references. Section numbers always have decimal points in them. Numbers without decimal points refer to pages. Thus, (2.1 29-32) refers to section 2.1, which is on pages 29-32.

7.1.1 The Research Question

The overarching research question, to which this thesis provides an answer, is: how is meaning generated though the relation of content and material in the art medal?

This question is concerned with the perception in artworks of qualities that are real but not concrete, and the relationship between these qualities and the actual materiality of the artwork. These qualities can be familiar, such as the perception of a loved-one from a photograph; or less easy to place within the purview of daily experience, for instance the perception of emotions and thought in abstract painting. These qualities, of presence, emotion and thought, are the content of the artwork.

The terms are carefully chosen. Ideas run like trains along the tracks of language. To ask the question more directly would be to dispatch thought towards a particular destination. For instance, to ask ‘how is material meaningful?’ is to suppose firstly that it is, and secondly, to imply that meaning is higher than material, as though it rises like steam from a pond. As should be apparent to the reader, one of the principal conclusions of this work is that meaning and material are mutually porous, and any such idea of elevation, abstraction or priority is an impediment to understanding.

7.1.2 Chapter 1

As sections 1.1-1.2 describe, the motivation for the research is personal (5-12). I have spent twenty-five years in art schools, first as a student, and then – for a longer period of time – as an academic. In educational intuitions as well as in broader practice, the tacit cultures of fine art and craft fall across two sides of the 'material culture' fold: whereas fine art values culture, craft practice celebrates material. For this reason artists are considered to be ontological (what matters is who they really *are*), whereas craftsmen are considered to be epistemological (what matters is what they can *do*). Craft and fine art are ideas of practice as much as they are empirical pursuits. The institutionalisation of this difference of emphasis, what we could call 'the practice of the ideas' of craft and art, has always felt to me like an imposition and a limitation: a false choice. The aim of the thesis, therefore, is to understand how material and content are related, and in gaining this understanding it is hoped that new avenues of expression and purpose will be opened up for practice.

The first incarnation of this project was to use the art medal, an object that belongs neither to art, nor to craft, as an interesting object for rethinking these terms. The background to this, and my introduction to the medal, is set out in section 1.3 (12-18). This first incarnation forms the basis of the material set out in chapters two and three. Chapters four, five and six build on this early research to address the relationship of content and material at a more fundamental and ultimately more productive level.

7.1.3 Chapter 2

Chapter two begins by defining the medal (2.1 29-32), and gives its early history and a sense of its evolution from the influence of coins, and other art forms into a mature and enduring art form (2.2 33). Humanist medals have a very particular visual language. This is described in section 2.3 (37). Typically, one face of a portrait medal presents a morally idealised image of the sitter. In this we can see the movement from the truth of likeness to a quality of moral character. The movement from likeness to quality is seen in larger form across both faces of a medal, between the portrait and the symbolic sides: just as the

portrait face combines the outwardly visible with the moral, so too the medal combines a public face with an allegorical and inwardly directed obverse.

Numismatics - the study of coins and medals - is largely directed at the maintenance of museum collections. These maintain hard boundaries, and are much concerned with clear definitions and operational limits. The continuous tradition of the medal is taken to begin with Pisanello's *John VIII Palaeologus*. However, there are earlier objects that share the medal's material form, while lacking the quality of personality that typifies the medal after Pisanello. Chapter two gives a physical description of one such precursor object, the Limbourg brother's medal of *Constantine the Great* (2.1.1 29-32), an important object for this research. Section 2.4 describes the ambiguous status of this medal, which was made about forty years before Pisanello's 'invention', and under remarkably similar historical circumstances (42-45).

Section 2.5 presents a detailed review of numismatic literature (45-56). The aim of this is to describe the current state of knowledge. Numismatics has not been much studied as a field from the outside, and this review is useful in uncovering the nature of its epistemology. The first contribution here is that the field's choice of originary object, Pisanello's medal of *John VIII Palaeologus*, is just that: a choice. Moreover, this choice entwines the operational and taxonomic focus of numismatics with a host of cultural rather than empirical assumptions, all of which cluster around the cult of the individual. The second contribution made here is to identify the two chief methods of numismatic study: connoisseurship and iconography. With the benefit of these twin realisations, we can see how numismatics views itself, and understand the beliefs that underlie its practice.

Numismatics is dominated by what I call its 'intersubjective method' (28). Medallic personalities, the artist's and the sitter's, are written into the material object by the artist's intelligent hand. The resultant objects, autonomous and freestanding, are uniquely adapted to the portrayal of the individual within a particular humanistic tradition. According to the beliefs that underpin the field, this autonomy of form is mirrored in the capacity of the numismatist to read the artist's work, and to realise judgements of character: the *virtù* (quality of

nobility and potential to act) of the artist being perfectly adapted to portray the *virtù* of the sitter, and finding its equal in the *virtù* of the numismatic connoisseur. In this way, numismatics is not so much a pursuit of cataloguing twin-sided, round metal objects, as it is a tradition of intersubjective reading, and the recognition of personality.

This tradition is still in evidence today, but more recent approaches – largely coming from universities rather than from the museum sector or private scholarship – employ the medal, not as objects of study, so much as data in support of larger scholarly aims. In this more academic literature, agency is an important concept, and the scholarly method is typified by an anaesthetic detachment.

7.1.4 Chapter 3

Chapter three turns from the study of medals to their production, and the contemporary context of practice. It begins with a review of the scission of art and craft as this is presented in the literature (3.1 60-60), before contributing, in an analysis of the medals of Alexandre Charpentier, a concrete instance in which the characters of the artist and the craftsman are used as contrasting ideas, capable of quotation (3.2 60-65). In these medals it is clear that Charpentier uses different processes to establish the modality of the subject matter. The arts are depicted as idealised personifications, in modelled and cast bronze; by contrast, craftsmen are shown in the language of social realism, in the more mechanical medium of struck bronze. In this example, the evidence of Charpentier's own 'hand', the authorial mark of modelling, signifies the larger and more philosophical potential of the artist as this was conceived in the nineteenth century.

Charpentier's work is consistent with the beliefs evident in connoisseurship at this time. Connoisseurial method treats the artist's hand as a form of bond, like a signature on a contract, which links an event of making to a personality. In this way, the artist's hand is a putting-forth, but it retains a returning movement to its point of origin. It is, therefore, a form of intermediation, a line that can be

traced in either direction, out into the world, or back to the person who made it.

The 'hand' plays other roles in art. As well as being the signature of making, it can be an idea or a symbol, or a real part of the body, a site of palpation and reception. The research began by recognising the medal as a particularly haptic sculptural form, between the cultures of craft and art. The proposition that it is well adapted for developing unusual authorial positions is tested in sections 3.3 (74-90) and 3.4 (90-94).

Section 3.3 presents three case studies of contemporary medallic work in which the hand plays a vital role (74-90). In each example, the work is characterised as a site of exchange, an open space. For Cathie Pilkington, this openness is put to the uses of ambiguity. She uses the medal as a tactic in her on-going burlesque of authorial pomposity in fine art, but without committing to the standards of technical rectitude that are associated with craft. In this way, her work presents a constantly moving target, one that is impossible to pin down as it flits from one idea of making to another, jamming the gears of cultural expectation. If Pilkington's work exploits ambiguity as a means of evasion, Felicity Powell and Chloe Shaw trade on ambiguity as mergence between object and subject, a means of connection. Their work develops a material contiguity between maker, object and viewer, a kind of contagion of contact that is a property – generally – of touch, and not of sight. Their work shows us that the bodily hand functions as a two-way bond, something we know instinctively from holding hands with other people.

Felicity Powell's work is the most evidently technically competent and dextrous of the three contemporary artists reviewed here, but it is in older medallic objects that the highest standard of technical difficulty is achieved. This is analysed in section 3.4 with the example of Nicholas Hilliard's medal of *Elizabeth I* (90-94). The example of this object is that its iconography of maritime and sovereign power gains force through the 'barbaric splendour' of its facture (Hill 1920:158), the baffling competence with which the object has been made.

The research presented in chapter three tests the starting premise of the project. While it shows that the proposition is true, that the medal can indeed function as a site where the roles of author and observer are developed in an unusual and productive manner, the analysis presented in these sections also shows the limits of this capacity, and especially so in relation to developing fresh 'ideas' of art and craft. Pilkington's work is the clearest example of the 'escape hatch' mentality proposed by Adamson (2007:69); but here the problem of the status of making and material is solved by translating technical processes into ideas of those processes – in the same way as Charpentier does – and ultimately this reinforces the dominant logic of fine art as a philosophical practice. The conclusion of these sections is that it is more provocative to look at *how* Powell's or Hilliard's work is meaningful, than to consider *what* it means. This realisation prompts the approach taken in the next three chapters.

7.1.5 Chapter 4

The fourth chapter presents the groundwork for a more fundamental look at the relationship of material and content in art (95-155). This work requires an understanding of how we experience and navigate the world. The chapter builds on Gregory Bateson's image of a blind man sensing his environment with a stick: 'Where does the blind man's self begin?', he asks, 'At the tip of the stick? At the handle of the stick? Or at some point halfway up the stick?' (2000:318)

The conclusion of this chapter is that we engage with the world through a simultaneous process of reaching out and withdrawal. The foundation is presented in section 4.1. Like all research in the arts, this project involves the interpretation of made things. The aspiration of interpretation is to discover something that is not apparent from an immediate encounter with the object. Therefore, interpretation is a form of movement, a 'spreading out' from the initial view.

The object of discovery in interpretation is meaning. Section 4.2 describes two cultures of meaning: mental representation and physical use (98-102). These correlate to two theories of language. Saussure elaborates the first of

these. It is a system of purely negative difference from reality. By contrast, in Peirce's theory of language, correspondence between sign and referent is anchored in a sensuously apprehended reality. This research differs from both of these systems in identifying them as representative of different directions of interpretive movement: similarity in one direction and difference in the other.

Recent debate has identified the critical importance of surface in the generation of meaning (Ingold 2017:99): 'sur-face' is face-like (Bruno 2014:14). Despite the recent resurgence of interest in this area, the physiognomy of art has long been intuited (Jaeger 2012:32; Gell 1998:13; Panofsky 1955:52; and for humanlikeness Belting 2011,1994; Freedberg 1989). As section 4.3 describes, art is face-like in three ways: much of it is comprised of portraits; art is responded to emotionally and behaviourally, as we respond to faces; and, in the same way as we read facial expressions, we infer the workings of a mind behind an artwork through experience and abductive reasoning (103-112). Whereas most of the contemporary debate on surface treats it as a thin skin, this research differs in attending to the density of the artwork, its weight, and the palpation of its media.

Intention is an important concept in relation to meaning. In the same way as meaning belongs on a spectrum between mental representation and physical use, intention can be formed either before or through physical engagement. Section 4.4 positions the ideas elaborated in this chapter, of interpretation, meaning, intent, language and perception, along a single axis, between inward and outward directions of movement (113-117). These are the up and down of Gregory Bateson's blind man's stick.

Section 4.5 (117-140) applies this theoretical work to the most important methods for numismatic study identified in chapter 2. Each of these has a representative statement of belief and method: Bernard Berenson's *Rudiments in Connoisseurship*, (4.5.1 118-127); Irwin Panofsky's *Iconography and Iconology* (4.5.2 128-131); and Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency* (4.5.3 131-140). Each of these texts presents a distinct negotiation of contact and of analytic position. Whereas connoisseurship is sensuously connected to its object of study, both iconography and agential approaches are (or aim to be) methodologically

anaesthetic. Despite this difference, Berenson and Gell share an important idea, namely that an index of a material event gives access to qualities of personality. In all three texts we read about art's physiognomic aspect, its face. The final section of this chapter considers the surface of the face and the way in which it may be conceived as a condition of thought and material structure, each being immanent to the other (4.6 140-153).

Portrait medals have two faces. The obverse presents an external and mimetic likeness that reaches out into the world and that shows the sitter as they appear at a given moment in time. The reverse, by contrast, shows an emblematic face that represents an idea of the sitter's enduring personality. George Hill identified the similarity of purpose between photography and medals (1912:9). In writing about photography, in the examples of Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin, we can see the same movement from the synchronic event of likeness to a quality of personality. Section 4.6 uses Benjamin's writing on aura in photography as a route into his philosophy of human experience (140-153).

Aura describes a propinquity of separation and closeness. It describes, for instance, an intensity of emotional contact with a person shown in a photograph: in other words, the apprehension of a quality, that is, nevertheless, not concretely present, an intensity of virtual connection. Aura is a useful critical term to describe the relation of index and quality in art, exactly the sort of relation that concerns Gell and Berenson. But Benjamin is quite clear that aura is a property that belongs to all things.

We are all part of creation. In as much as reality exists, we are in it. Yet, at the same time, we feel ourselves apart from it. We are able to move both up and down the blind man's stick. The contribution of chapter four is to consider Peirce's theory of language alongside Benjamin's philosophy of human experience. The chapter develops a theory of perception, and an understanding of meaning as a surface woven between similarity and difference. There is much research directed at surfaces and their relation to meaning. Unlike the consensus in the field, this research conceives of the surface of meaning not as a gossamer film or insubstantial meniscus, but as a thick experience.

The work of chapter four is dense, general and somewhat philosophical. The next two chapters provide concrete instances in which specific relations of material and content can be understood. One of the conclusions of this research – as should already be clear – is that meaning is not something that is given, or that exists prior to our encounter with the world. It is something that is made, and that is made through movement.

7.1.6 Chapter 5

Chapter five considers an aesthetics of reception, and the generation of meaning in the use of art medals in the Valois court (156-180). The argument presented here is that the medal of *Constantine The Great* in the collection of the Duke of Berry acted as a device in a larger system of objects from which content could be actively constructed through practice and play. The chapter shows that *Constantine* is part of a group of similar objects depicting the Duke of Berry, the Virgin Mary, Augustus and other Roman emperors. The argument that all of these objects are related to role of the Valois nobleman as a Christian warrior, and, more specifically, that they develop the personal image of their patron, the Duke of Berry, is dependent on a new finding – presented here for the first time – that the iconography of the *Constantine* is dependent on the seal imagery of Baldwin II, a Frankish nobleman who was the last Latin Emperor of Constantinople. This contribution to numismatic knowledge is presented in section 5.2 (162-173).

The final part of the chapter, section 5.3, describes the function of the medal as a device for drawing identities together into one surface, and for their refraction through a process of play in connection with the larger set of objects to which they belong (173-179). The conclusion of this chapter is that the *Constantine* does not have a single rational meaning. This work is consistent with an emergent awareness in art history that humanist and late mediaeval objects, such as Dürer's famous etching *Melencholia I*, are intended to stimulate multiple and contradictory meanings, and to engage their users in thought rather than to communicate a specific or singular message: meaning, in these works, is a kind of practice, a form of movement rather than denotation. The

iconographic findings of this chapter are also consistent with the emergent view in numismatics, developed most forcefully by Tanja Jones, that the art medal is particularly related to the cause of Eastern Christianity.

7.1.7 Chapter 6

Chapter six develops an aesthetics of production, and the generation of meaning in craft practice (181-205). This research came out of the needs of practice. Whereas chapter five considers how meaning is constructed through engagement with material objects, this chapter considers the relationship of content and material from a technical perspective, in order to examine how making is negotiated through systems of embodied decision-making and material.

Very little theory is written by people who have the authority of practice. One exception to this is the British furniture designer and woodworker David Pye. Pye is remembered today largely for his writing on workmanship. This has informed a lot of contemporary writing on craft, and is frequently cited. His work on design theory is less regarded. Chapter six begins by synthesising both strands of work, and positioning this synthesis in relation to the British anthropologist Tim Ingold's work on perception, matter and creativity (183-190). The work of these opening sections is to understand Pye's theoretical contribution as twofold. There is his well recognised contribution to our technical understanding of making; but in addition to this should be added his often overlooked view that all human creation happens in a system of tools, people and media, and that this system is nested within a larger economy of matter and energy, with a life long after and long before the act of making itself. In this latter respect, Pye's work presages much of Ingold's recent writing on the subject of creativity.

Whereas Ingold's work is academic, the advantage of studying Pye is that he left a body of practice, his famous *Fluting Engine*, and a few brief pieces of writing on how he made things. These have never been properly considered against a synthesis of Pye's own theoretical work, and this is the task of section 6.3 (190-200). This analysis reveals two ways in which Pye's work should be

regarded as a transductive (self-structuring) system of growth. The first of these is the evidence of a slow improvisation, in which the engine is modified and new forms become apparent. From the evidence of Pye's own writing, these new forms are not posed from outside the system. They are discovered from within the system of making, a system in which Pye is the human component.

The second element of transduction can be seen in the example of every individual dish. Pye describes his entry of the system, through judgements of hand and eye as the engine's turntable is rotated. Each pass of the gouge corresponds to a movement of Pye's hand, modulated through the engine's lever. The previous pass of the gouge directs each subsequent pass. In this way, each dish is an accretion of self-structuring movements. Both in the case of the evolution of gross form, as well as in the disposal of each individual dish, Pye is not projecting his vision through the engine so much as he is discovering outcomes from a system of latent potential. In this way, Pye's work provides an exemplary instance in which we can see and understand the interpenetration of the mental and the material, and, therefore, the mutual porosity of content and material.

This research has been informed by the recent attention given to haptic perception by authors such as Giuliana Bruno (2014) and Tim Ingold (2017). This research differs from the consensus in the field by drawing attention from virtual touch to what I describe as 'concrete touch' (154,195,201). This is the difference between feeling by analogy, with a range of human faculties, and often at a distance, and actually feeling, with real and bodily hands. In the last substantive section of chapter six, I use Pye's work to show how thought is formed through concrete touch and physical feedback (200-204). Pye's engine can be regarded as an imaginary space, an extension of the artist's mind, but it is also the site of Pye's embodied technical knowledge and stylistic tendency. In this present case, I suggest that it is not just Pye's mind that is extended through the engine, but his body too, and that we should consider his hand and engine together as the location this embodied stylistic knowledge, Pye's personal handwriting.

7.2 Conclusion

This research project has moved through two distinct phases. The first conception was to test the proposition that the art medal could be used by practioners to develop new authorial positions. The idea was that this art form, neither art nor craft, and so evidently haptic, would enable artists to escape what I perceived to be the limits of fine art's dominant logic: its prioritisation of discourse, of the mental at the expense of the physical, of the universal at the expense of the contingent. It could operate as a space where ideas of art and craft could be played with, and tested.

This first phase was productive in two ways. Firstly, I found that the medal does offer this opportunity. But this opportunity was within limits, as - more significantly - I also found that I had started with the wrong question. The project promised to offer an alternative to the dichotomous relationship of craft and art; but by emphasising ideas of identity the initial design of the project served to perpetuate the difference between these two fields.

Nevertheless, several of the objects that I had examined during this first phase pointed the way forwards. The fascinating materiality of the medal by Nicholas Hilliard of *Elizabeth I* was one such signal object. And, among the contemporary work, Felicity Powell's medals suggested a propitious way of discovering what the art form has to offer, and the way in which it can be instructive for future practice. In particular, it was her use of the medal as a site for merging maker, object and viewer, and the ambiguous relations that her work constructs. In her work, the medal is a site of material contact, a two-way bond between subject and object.

So, the first phase of the research project was misdirected, but constructive: without it, I would not have been able to discover the question that I should have been asking. This new question – the overarching question that runs throughout this thesis – is this: how is meaning generated through the relation of content and material in the art medal?

In pursuing an answer to this question, a theme emerged and developed over the course of the project: the faculty of touch and its relationship with thought.

7.2.1 The Thought of Touch

As Philip Attwood describes, in the art medal 'the tactile is as important as the visual in a way that is not true of any other artistic medium' (2012:9). Touch is an intimate sensation in a way that sight is not. These two senses correspond to qualities that the medal draws together in its very format. Thus, the Renaissance medal combines a public face with an allegorical and inwardly directed obverse (2.3.1-2.3.2). The public face uses the implicit touch of sensuous and natural likeness; the inward face is literary, more private, sometimes recondite or abstruse.

It is in the nature of medals that they face in both directions. One of the conclusions of this research is that this Janus-faced structure is reflected in numismatics as a field of study (2.5). Numismatic method draws together philosophically incompatible methods from connoisseurship and iconography. Connoisseurship is based around the primary significance of the 'event of art' (Berenson 1920:120), the meeting of personality and material, and the unique signature of that engagement. By contrast, iconography is philosophical. It extracts meaning from the husk of matter, and withdraws.

In connoisseurship, it is taken as an article of faith that making preserves an expressive and intimate relationship to the artist's hand. This is a specific and contingent relationship that is based on empirical observation – but in the practice of connoisseurship, as described by Hill, the 'general impression' is the most important criterion (1978:21) – we find this belief repeated by Scher (1993:3) and again by Berenson (1920:148). Furthermore, attribution is only important in as much as it enables works to be considered together, as products of an artist's single 'mind' (Hill 1978:21). In this way, the mind is made accessible by virtue of the material object of the medal, but it also exceeds these material limitations: the artist's mind acts *through* the medal, rather than being *of* the medal; or more precisely, it acts through a series of medals, like a constellation of thoughts that together form an image of the single mind.

It is, then, in thinking about the art medal and the beliefs that underlie numismatic study that the importance of touch starts to emerge. There is a

belief expressed, through the format of the medal itself - the most haptic form of art - that a sense of personality, an enduring quality of morality or nobility, arises from sensuous experience. The mirror of this belief is found again in numismatic study, and in connoisseurship more generally: that an event of artistic making, the contingent actions of hand and material, give access to qualities of personality.

These thoughts are developed in relation to Renaissance objects, and, in particular, Edwardian and Victorian ideas of them. Here, we can see the materials of art being pulled in two directions, to give access to a stable and enduring, abstract, sense of identity on the one hand, but also to form an indexical bond with a contingent event of personality. In contemporary artwork, the same kind of movement can be found again, from touch to personality. This is what we can see in Powell's work, and in particular in her work with wax.

When wax is warm, it presents a remarkable affinity with the artist's fingertip. Once handled, even when cooled, a ball of wax will retain a residue of touch. But touch is not just located in the hand. It is a sense that pervades the whole body. The sensation of working with warm wax extends and merges the body as a whole with its materials. This mergence of self and material is thematised in Powell's work. Her works are like votives, material images in Didi-Huberman's sense (2007:9) that operate through a material contiguity with their maker, and (especially in the context of an exhibition of amulets and charms) with the users of the objects. Powell's work is unusual in being made from wax: but all medals warm in the hand of their beholder, both figuratively and literally, and by appealing to the viewer's faculty of touch they act as sites of mergence. This is what is really transformational about touch – it both merges and defines the self and other. It is the site where mimesis and alterity meet.

The main conclusion of this research is that palpation, the faculty of concrete touch, is a vital arbiter of meaning in the visual arts. Whereas recent research has drawn attention to the surfaces of meaning and the role of haptic vision, which is to say an *idea* of projected touch, this research draws attention to the generative faculty of concrete touch. Many of the critical texts that are

treated here draw attention to the physiognomic nature of art (particularly Gell 1998:13; Panofsky 1955:52; but also Jaeger 2012:32; and for humanlikeness Belting 2011,1994; Freedberg 1989); other authors have understood the importance of the face-likeness of art, but in the main the image of the artwork as a facial encounter promotes the idea of art as being somehow thin, a mere appearance, an apparition. But most art is not literally thin: even paintings, generally, have several layers of paint, and other surfaces beneath, hidden to immediate sight. This real, physical depth serves a purpose. It draws attention to itself. It has a mute iconicity. It acts as a frame that arrests the viewer's attention and intimates the mind at work 'inside', the animating principle somewhere within a thickening surface. This depth incites palpation, both explicitly, to explore it with ones fingers, but also implicitly, to see its surface not as an envelope that conceals and delimits, but as an object of 'haptic vision' that reveals through its surface its 'substantive composition' (Ingold 2017:102). This depth might be implicit, but more often, as is the case with sculpture and with medals, it is actual. It is the mirror of our own sense of inwardness, a body that preserves identity from one moment to the next, like a mediaeval seal.

In the same way as intention is inferred by the viewer through palpation, the agency of the maker is developed in concert with materials. No object, either the maker or the artwork, can be considered on its own. This thesis has been concerned with an axis of movement between self and world – made familiar by the image of Bateson's blind man's stick (2000:318). All of us are in an indexical relation with creation; but as complex beings we have a faculty of thought, which we feel as though it is inside us. It is through thought that we can perceive the world around us. We imagine ourselves to be distinct from the objects of our perception, even if it is only though our continuity with these objects, and our likeness to them that we can perceive them at all (Böhme 2017:13-54, esp. 20-24,46-52). Our perception is a form of stretching out, a movement along the blind man's stick, from abstraction to concretion, from language to material, from difference to similarity. This movement is governed by the faculty of touch.

Chapters five and six of this thesis provide examples where these thoughts can be seen in concrete instance. They are both concerned with systems. As Pye explained, all of creation is a system, within which other systems can be nested (1964:15-22). Although humans view the world in terms of our own biography, we enter a system that began before we did, and that will carry on without us. It is a form of vanity to imagine our projects as discrete endeavours, which start with ideation and which end with the completed product (Ingold 2013:20-21).

Chapter five describes a system formed by a collection of medals in the possession of the Duke of Berry. In this chapter, meaning is shown to emerge through the medals being used within this system, paired, turned over and moved around, to create ideas of the future. The chief medal in this system, the *Constantine*, is intentionally like a seal. The medal's compositional self-mirroring creates a material iconicity: the medal points to other things, but mainly to itself. The argument of this chapter is that the *Constantine* is a device that works by opening up and exploiting the thick surface – the atmosphere – of this distance, between material and language, hand and brain. It gestures to other things, like a sign, but it draws them into it, like a trap. Meaning is negotiated from these objects through their manipulation. A thought that I want to emphasise here, in this conclusion, is that there is latitude of movement within this system through which the human operator, in this case the Duke himself, can negotiate. This is one instance in which meaning emerges in a system of objects, through touch.

Chapter five is necessarily speculative – the collection is dispersed, and the objects come down to us through written descriptions and from after-casts and copies. But the penultimate chapter presents an extant contemporary example for demonstrating the same ideas: David Pye's *Fluting Engine*. As this analysis shows, there are two systems at work here, both of which are governed by the thought of touch. The first of these is a slow improvisation of form, as Pye discovers the affordances of the *Engine*, and negotiates form. As the Pye gains information, he adapts his tool. And so the system develops by negotiation, slowly changing through discovery and design, all of it based on what Pye

described as the 'principle of "truck"' (1965:15), or what Banham described as 'fit' (Banham 1973:139).

The first system is concerned with the determination of gross form. The second system governs the production of each individual dish. The operation of the *Fluting Engine* is largely progressive and self-structuring. But Pye designed his tool to have a human component, introducing 'the element of freedom' by which the flutes are spaced (1986:46). The form of play that is opened up here is latitude of movement, within which the hand can act. Both in the system of medals described in chapter five, and the system of production described in chapter six, meaning emerges within this space, through the principal of touch, as a movement, a width, a spreading out.

Touch is important because it lets us into the world. It is a sense that pervades the body. It marks both the boundary of our bodies, and our receptiveness to other things, and to extension through them. Anna Morandi's anatomical models show this understanding, and it is this that Powell makes such rich use of in her work.

7.2.2 Contribution to Knowledge

The germinal impulse of this research was my intuition that the material knowledge of sculptural practice, one particular relation of material and content in art, is constructive of meaning. I felt that this knowledge was not sufficiently valued. I felt that too much emphasis, too much space, was given to discourse and to logo-centric signification, and not enough to the embodied 'knowing-how-to-act' of making. I had thought that by borrowing ideas from craft I could find a new way forward. I came to realise that I should have been looking not at how craft was different, but rather at what craft shared with art: a competence of making, the thought of touch. It was only by looking at the art medal that I was able to find the right way of thinking about this problem, because it faces in two directions, both up and down the blind man's stick. The medal was both the principal object of study, from which the larger conclusions are drawn, and it was also the guide, the means for drawing those conclusions. Through this

double function of lens and object, this research has advanced numismatic understanding.

Numismatics has an underdeveloped historiography. This thesis presents a detailed and useful account of the assumptions, beliefs and methods of numismatics, and this will be useful for future scholars. The research has also uncovered new knowledge concerning the iconography of Baldwin II and its connection to the Limbourg Brother's medal of *Constantine*. This discovery advances understanding of the early medal, and supports the emergent view, led by Tanja Jones (2015, 2014, 2011), that the early medal is concerned with the plight of Eastern Christendom.

In addition to this specific numismatic contribution to knowledge, the main contribution of this research is to the understanding and practice of contemporary art and craft. Through the work on the medal, this thesis demonstrates the mutual immanence of material and content in the making and perception of things. The work presented in this thesis does not 'solve' the historical problem of the relationship between fine art and craft, but it works through this problem, to direct attention at what really matters: the relation of material and content. This research demonstrates a mutual immanence between these terms, in which neither term is prior. The contribution of this new epistemology of ideation in material practice is twofold. Firstly, it articulates the intelligence of making. It shows that the hand is an intelligent organ. In particular, it presents an argument for concrete touch. Secondly, it provides a direction for future research, in which the crafts – for their accumulated knowledge of working with tools and machines and through skilled material processes – will play a particularly vital role.

7.3 Future Research

The work on David Pye presents an argument for concrete – that is actual, not virtual – touch.

Machines extend human capabilities. This is the example of cybernetics. It follows that an increase in computer processing power will lead to an escalation of human potential. But one of the concluding arguments of chapter six is that

the symbolic nature of coding offers a false paradigm for human thought. Because we can develop cognitive processes in computer language, we come to think of cognition as symbolic computation. This error is all the more tempting because it satisfies the linguistic bias in our knowledge-culture. It is a misdirection towards the Cartesian mind, and a significant backward turn.

By contrast, this research has provided examples of analogic computation: the extended body as a thinking system. There is a speculative analysis of this in chapter five, and a concrete example presented in chapter six. No one today would argue with the proposition that thinking is embodied. But this is a bit like understanding that people live in houses, and that their houses are important to them. The idea that the extended body is itself a cognitive system remains undomesticated.

We are at the dawn of a new technological age. We will encounter progressively powerful cognitive machines, artificial intelligences, and they will guide us in our choices. This new horizon is inevitable, and it could be for good or ill. As digital processes increasingly modulate cultural production, there is a danger that the role of the body will be reduced. Already, concrete touch is replaced by virtual touch, a haptics, screened by machines that convert pressure into symbolic representation. In order to prevent an etiolation of human experience, a withering of the body and the blunting of its thoughts, it will be increasingly important to articulate the value and meaning of human cognition, and the thought of concrete touch. This is the extraordinary competence of craft. In negotiating a productive and human future, craft can make a significant contribution as it is extended through technology. In attending to this future, we must be critical of the nature of cognition as it develops, and be mindful of the value of embodied touch.

Appendix – The Images Searches

One aspect of demonstrating that the medal of *Constantine the Great* is dependent on the iconography of the seals of Baldwin II was to check that there were no other widely circulating images that resemble the medal.

The First Search

The first search was conducted in 2015. The process followed is to refer to several large digitised collections to actively seek out images of the Emperor Constantine and the Holy Riders of Byzantine culture, the saints George, Theodore, Demetrius, etc., or any other saint on horseback.

The collections that are referenced are: the British Museum's *Collection online* which catalogues 3.5 million objects of which approximately one third are indexed with images; two databases of the Louvre's collection, *Arts Graphiques* and the *Atlas Database*, the former indexing 230,000 prints and drawings, and the latter all of the works that the Louvre displays, some 30,000 items, these two databases overlapping to a limited extent; the database of the National Gallery, London which contains images of all but 50 of its paintings; the database of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, that has more than 45,000 indexed works with images; the Victoria and Albert Museum's which has more than 500,000 indexed works with images; and the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, which provides access to over 250,000 records for medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, with more than 57,000 indexed works with images.

These collections were selected for the breadth of their holdings, encompassing painting, sculpture, prints and drawings, as well as coins, seals, decorated or image-bearing objects such as capitals, bowls, etc., from a range of dates and civilisations. In order to provide a structure for the analysis of images, a set of criteria are used to direct attention to different elements of the image, such as: whether the rider's arm is bent in front of the figure; whether the arm is held away from the torso laterally; whether the rider's hand is to the other side of the horse's mane; whether the elbow is in front of the hand; whether the rider is holding reins; whether the hand is held palm upwards; and so forth,

to cover the particularities of the image. The aim of developing this taxonomy is to provide a structure for looking at the images, and to ensure that each image received equal attention.

In addition to these very specific criteria, which are empirical judgements of similarity, a final criterion is whether the image feels – in a more intuitive manner – as though it is like the *Constantine*, in other words, a general sense of similarity regardless of the details.

The search terms that were used in order to gather images were: Constantine; Constantine AND horse; Saint AND horse; George; Theodore; Demetrius; Eustace; Eustathius. The search terms for French databases were translated accordingly: Constantin; Constantin AND cheval; saint AND cheval; Georges; Théodore; Demetrius; Eustache; Eustathe.

It was decided also to use this as an opportunity to look for any repetition or reminiscence of the image after its date of production, the reason being that this may throw useful light on the adoption of the image in Renaissance Italy, or produce a sibling image with an ancestry that could be traced back productively as another means of uncovering the *Constantine*'s patrimony.

The search produced 101 images of Constantine or any saint or associated figure on horseback dated between 500 and 1550 AD. There are some detailed findings: for instance, although 17 of the 101 images have the rider's left elbow forward of their left hand in the direction of travel, only 4 of the 101 are holding reins in a clearly rotated grip, with a further 2 where this is debatable or uncertain; but there are only two images where both of these criteria are fulfilled, namely that the rider has a rotated grip *and* his left elbow is forward of his wrist, and held before his torso. One of these is a copy of the *Constantine*. The other example is *Saint George and the Dragon* by Rogier van der Weyden of c.1432-1435. Here, although the rider's grip is turned upwards and his arm is bent back on itself, it does not return to his thorax in quite the same manner, and the position of his right arm is without relation to the medallion.

In addition to the van der Weyden, there are two other images produced by this search that appear interesting in this context. One is an icon of *Saint George and the Youth of Mytilene* (**figure 57**), possibly from the Levant and dated to the

mid thirteenth century, by far the more similar of the two; the other is an icon of *Saint George from Crete*, dated to c. 1430. In both of these images, the riders' arms circle his torso, which is rotated towards the viewer; and though this detail is less salient, the horse's legs are in the same position too. But there are obvious departures, even in the more similar of the two: Saint George's clothes are quite different; there is a narrative context to explain the position of his right hand, which is crooked around the youth whom he has just rescued; and his left hand is not rotated. The conclusion of this search is that there is no freely circulating precedent for the image of the *Constantine* in the canon.

This first search was very large, encompassing about two million individual objects. It was also 'smart', in that it used well-catalogued databases that are designed in order to be queried; however, it does have some weaknesses. The first of these is that the criteria used to examine the images, the taxonomy that was developed, assumes that the precedent would be on a right facing horse, and so undue attention was paid to the rider's left arm; this is less than perfect, clearly, but as all of the images of Constantine and related figures were catalogued, it was possible to go back through these results and to check that no left facing images were miscoded; they were not.

The more serious deficiency is that the collections referenced are designed by and large to represent artistic high-points, and not to offer a comprehensive record of the image culture of a civilisation, (though the British Museum is more useful in that latter respect). For this reason a second search was undertaken, with improved criteria for examining images.

The Second Search

This second search is restricted to the Warburg Institute's *Photographic Collection*. This contains c.350,000 photographs of works of art and other image bearing objects, including the *Census of Antique Art and Architecture Known to the Renaissance*. The photographic collection is designed to help users to trace the development of iconography over time. A further advantage of how this collection is organised is that it enables a broader approach to be taken, with sections covering classifications such as 'Soldiers; Post-Classical; On Horseback',

'Triumphant Horsemen', and 'Hunting; Mounted', as well as folders on specific people. Constantine has three folders that catalogue his imagery: 'Roman Emperors; Constantine I, The Great; Census' which contains all of the antique images of Constantine that were known to the Renaissance; 'Roman Emperors; Constantine I, The Great; Miscellaneous', which holds images of him in his role as Emperor; and 'St. Constantine', which holds his hagiographical images.

Again, the search is also broadened to include all of the folders of the Byzantine warrior saints, as well as other precedents that may be germane. These include images of: Augustus and the Tiburtine Sibyl, as it is known that the Duke of Berry had a particular fascination with this image; Bellerophon, as his iconography can be seen to inform the development of the warrior Saint; Roman Emperors and Byzantine Rulers, for obvious reasons. In addition, every folder title that referred to horses or riding was also included. This search yielded four images that seem interesting, the same *Saint George and the Youth of Mytilene*, two Russian icons of Saint George of c.1425 and c.1450, and an ungainly English carving of the same saint of about 1500. In the last three of these examples, the rider's left hand is bent forwards and rotated, with the palm holding the reins face up; but again, as is the case with the Rogier van der Weyden, the right arm is raised above the rider's head, and holds the lance with which the dragon is transfixed. This search was also undertaken in 2015.

Conclusion

The searches described above review the image culture of the period from c. 500 – 1550 to discover any general precedent or trend that might contextualise the image of Constantine on the medallion. The irresistible conclusion from these two searches is that the medal does not derive from any widely circulating image; but it is suggested that it may carry some echo of Saint George's iconography.

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Understanding Material and Content in Made Things, with particular reference to the art medal

Benedict Andrew Carpenter

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Volume II – Images

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List of Figures

Some figures are repeated in-line in Volume I as thumbnails for ease of reference. Larger and better quality reproductions are included in this volume. These are listed below.

6 Limbourg Brothers, *Heraclius*, (1402), 98mm diameter, cast bronze, obverse and reverse. British Museum, Inv. 238. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

7 Pisanello, *John VIII Palaeologus*, (c.1438-1442), 103mm diameter, cast bronze, obverse and reverse. British Museum, Inv. G3.NapM.9. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

8 Gold coin of Holy Roman and King of Sicily, Emperor Frederick II, (c.1231), 20mm diameter, struck gold, obverse and reverse. British Museum, Inv. C.2809. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

9 Leon Battista Alberti, *Self-Portrait*, (c.1435), 201mm x 136mm, cast bronze, uniface object. National Gallery of Art, Washington, USA. Samuel H. Kress Collection Inv. 1957.14.125 Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington

10 Matteo de'Pasti, *Leon Battista Alberti*, (c. 1446-1450), 92.5mm diameter, cast bronze, obverse and reverse. British Museum Inv. G3,IP.1. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

11 Pisanello, *Leonello d'Este*, (1444), 68.5mm diameter, cast bronze, obverse and reverse. British Museum Inv. G3,FerrM.27. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

12 Alexandre Charpentier *Masons*, (c.1905), 60mm x 75mm, biface plaquette, struck bronze. Photograph © the author

13 Alexandre Charpentier, *Duval Janvier*, (1902), 53mm x 60mm, struck bronze, obverse. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A.32-1978. © Victoria and Albert Museum

14 Alexandre Charpentier, *Duval Janvier*, (1902), 53mm x 60mm, struck bronze, reverse. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A.32-1978. © Victoria and Albert Museum

15 Alexandre Charpentier, *Muller Stoneware Manufactory*, (1897), 914mm x 645mm, glazed stoneware, uniface plaque. Metropolitan Museum, New York. 1989.8. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum

16 Classical intaglio showing *Athena Parthenos holding Victory with a wreath, spear and shield* carved sardonyx, 16mm high. British Museum, Inv. 1925,1017.3. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

17 Alexandre Charpentier, *Muller Stoneware Manufactory*, (1897), 98mm x 65mm, cast bronze, uniface plaquette. Metropolitan Museum, New York. 03.7.26. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum

18 Alexandre Charpentier, *Sculpture*, (c.1897), 78mm x 145mm, cast bronze, uniface plaquette. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. 328-1901. © Victoria and Albert Museum

19 Alexandre Charpentier, *Painting*, (c.1897), 82mm x 151mm, cast bronze, uniface plaquette. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. 327-1901. © Victoria and Albert Museum

20 Alexandre Charpentier, *Door Furniture*, (c.1900), 79mm x 46mm, cast and gilded brass. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. 329-1901. © Victoria and Albert Museum

21 Alexandre Charpentier, *Mother nursing her baby*, (1899), 81mm x 52mm, struck bronze, obverse, biface plaquette (reverse shows a young woman in profile). Victoria and Albert Museum, London. 840-1900. © Victoria and Albert Museum

22 Cathie Pilkington, *Jumping Jack*, (2011), 69mm x 50mm, struck bronze and ribbon. Photo © Stephen Dodd, image used with kind permission of The British Art Medal Society

23 Cathie Pilkington, *Jumping Jack*, (2011), 69mm x 50mm, struck and painted bronze and ribbon. Photo © Stephen Dodd, image used with kind permission of The British Art Medal Society

24 Cathie Pilkington, *Majolica*, (2007), 730 x 400 x 320 mm, ceramic, gloss and oil paint. Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art

25 Cathie Pilkington, *Jumping Jack*, (2011), spinning, struck bronze and ribbon, 69 x 50mm. Photo © Stephen Dodd, image used with kind permission of The British Art Medal Society

26 John Jaques & Son, *Happy Families*, (1910). Originally published in 1851 from drawings by Sir John Tenniel. Photograph © World of Playing Cards, image used with kind permission

27 Cathie Pilkington, *Amulet (1)*, (2011), obverse, plaster and oil paint, 100mm x 70mm. © Cathie Pilkington, image used with kind permission

28 Felicity Powell, *Sleight of Hand*, (2011), screen-grab from single channel video installation

29 Felicity Powell, *Sleight of Hand*, (2011), single channel video installation

30 Felicity Powell, *Bees*, (2009), wax on slate mirror back, 200mm diameter

31 Anna Morandi, *Self-Portrait*, (1750-1755), wax and mixed media. Musei di Palazzo Poggi, University of Bologna. Image used under CC BY-SA 3.0 license

32 Anna Morandi, *Sensitive Hands*, (1755), wax and mixed media. Musei di Palazzo Poggi, University of Bologna. Image used under CC BY-SA 3.0 license

33 An advert for the "Lovett" Motor Mascot, image in the public realm

34 Edward Lovett, *The "Lovett Motor Mascot"*, (1912), aluminium, 160 x 120 x 20mm. Image courtesy Southwark Council Cuming Museum Collection

35 Three First World War charms from the Edward Lovett collection. Photograph: Science Museum London via Wellcome Images. Used under a Creative Commons license, CC BY 4.0

36 Felicity Powell, *John Charles Robinson Medal*, (2002), obverse and reverse, cast bronze, 115mm diameter. Photograph © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

37 Chloe Shaw, *This Living Hand*, (2011), obverse, cast bronze and thermochromatic paint, 48mm diameter. Shown here in its cool state. © Chloe Shaw, image used with kind permission

38 Chloe Shaw, *This Living Hand*, (2011), edge, cast bronze and thermochromatic paint, 48mm diameter. Shown here in its cool state. © Chloe Shaw, image used with kind permission

39 Chloe Shaw, *This Living Hand*, (2011), cast bronze and thermochromatic paint, 48mm diameter. Shown here, left, in its cool state, and right, same face, in its warm state. © Chloe Shaw, image used with kind permission

40 Nicholas Hilliard, *Elizabeth I*, (1589), chased gold, 44mm diameter. British Museum, London, Inv. M.6903. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

41 Johann Baptist von Spix, *Cephalogenesis, Table 1*, (1815), lithograph. Image in the public realm and out of copyright. Source: Archiv der Zoologischen Staatssammlung München

42 Giovanni Morelli, *Typical Hands* and *Typical Ears, Table 1* from Morelli (1892:77,78)

43 *Bronze Amulet*, (4 – 5 century CE), cast bronze, 53mm diameter, Syria or Palestine, Dumbarton Oaks Collection. Accession number: 50.15. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC, image used with kind permission

44 Child's paper fortune teller. Photograph © the author

45 Seal of Alexios Komnenos Angelos depicting *Saint George* (c. 1190), obverse and reverse, lead, Constantinople?, from Zacos and Veglery (1972:1555, number 2745, Pl.188)

46 Lead Seal of Baldwin II, Latin Emperor of Constantinople, (1240-1261), obverse and reverse, lead, France?, Constantinople?, from Zacos and Veglery (1972:102-104, number 114a, Pl. 28)

47 Lead Seal of Baldwin II, Latin Emperor of Constantinople, (1240-1261), obverse and reverse, lead, France?, Constantinople?, from Zacos and Veglery (1972:102-104, number 114b, Pl. 28)

48 Gold Seal of Baldwin II, Latin Emperor of Constantinople, (1268), gold, France, from Schlumberger (1943:Pl.VII/5), in the Archives Nationales, Inv. J.419,5

49 Etching of a *Seal of Baldwin II,* from Morand (1790:plate attached following 68). The gold seal was formerly attached to a document dated 1247 both now destroyed

50 Medal depicting *Constantine the Great* (1402), 88mm diameter, silver repoussé, obverse and reverse, detail. British Museum Inv. M.269 © Trustees of the British Museum

51 City of Corby, 1228, *Seal of Corby*, France, cast of AN D5761, collection of Notre Dame University, America

52 *Virgin and Child*, (c.1415), Franco-Flemish copy, bronze plaquette, in the Staatliche Museeun zu Berlin, from Scher (2000:19, Fig. 1.8)

53 Seal of Jean de Berry, Seal of the Duke (1397), France, from Gandilhon (1933:Pl.XIV/4)

54 Seal of Jean de Berry, Count of Mâcon, (1367), France, from Gandilhon (1933:Pl.XIII/2)

55 *Medallion of Justinian*, (527-565 CE), obverse and reverse, modern electrotype copy after gold original, c.85mm diameter, Byzantine, in British Museum. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

56 Gold solidus of Constantine the Great, minted in Trier, Germany, (326-327 CE), British Museum Inv. 1864,1128.188. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

57 Anon., *Saint George and the Youth of Mytilene*, (c. 1250), Middle East, possibly Palestine/Israel, in British Museum, London. Inv. BM1984,0601.1. Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum

58 Limbourg Brothers, *The Meeting of the Magi* in *Très Riches Heures*, (1411-1416), f. 51v, French, in the Musée Condé, France. Photograph: commons.wikimedia.org, original in public domain. Used under a Creative Commons license, CC BY

59 Limbourg Brothers, *Ara Coeli*, (1411-1416), detail, in *Très Riches Heures*, f.22r, French, in the Musée Condé, France. Photograph: commons.wikimedia.org, original in public domain. Used under a Creative Commons license, CC BY

60 Limbourg Brothers, *Ara Coeli*, (1405-1408/9), in *Belles Heures*, f. 26v, French, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Photograph: commons.wikimedia.org, original in public domain. Used under a Creative Commons license, CC BY

61 David Pye, *Dish,* (1980), 420mm long, Brazilian rosewood. Crafts Council, W43. Photograph: Nick Moss, courtesy of the Crafts Council

62 David Pye, *The Nature of Design*, (1972 edition). Cover showing Benjamin Vulliamy's *Regulator Clock* (c.1780), collection Science Museum, London

63 David Pye, *Fluting Engine*, (1949-1950), shown here in its 1980's iteration, from Pye (1986:47)

64 Zeke Leonard, *Homage to David Pye*, (2011), Salvaged long-leaf pine, 229mm x 229mm x 51mm. © Zeke Leonard. Image used with kind permission

65 David Grimshaw, *Homage to David Pye*, (2014), CNC Routed bowl. © David Grimshaw. Image used with kind permission

66 David Pye operating the Fluting Engine, from Pye (1986:24). Photograph: uncredited

Figures

1. David Shrigley *I'm Dead*, 2010

2. David Shrigley *Life Model*, 2012

3. Chelsea College of Art and Design in April or May 1997

4. Copy of the *Golden Bull of Emperor Charles IV*, 1356

5. Medal depicting *Constantine the Great*, 1402

6. Medal depicting *Heraclius*, 1402

7. Medal by Pisanello depicting *John VIII Palaeologus*, c.1438-1442

8. Gold coin of Holy Roman and King of Sicily, Emperor Frederick II, c.1231

9. *Self-Portrait* by Leon Battista Alberti, c.1435

10. Medal by Matteo de'Pasti of *Leon Battista Alberti*, c. 1446-1450

11. Medal by Pisanello of *Leonello d'Este*, 1444

12. Alexandre Charpentier *Masons*, c.1905

13. Alexandre Charpentier *Duval Janvier*, 1902, obverse

14. Alexandre Charpentier *Duval Janvier*, 1902, reverse

15. Alexandre Charpentier, *Muller Stoneware Manufactory*, 1897

16. Classical intaglio showing *Athena Parthenos holding Victory with a wreath, spear and shield* carved sardonyx

17. Alexandre Charpentier*, Muller Stoneware Manufactory*, 1897

18. Alexandre Charpentier, *Sculpture*, c.1897

19. Alexandre Charpentier *Painting*, c.1897

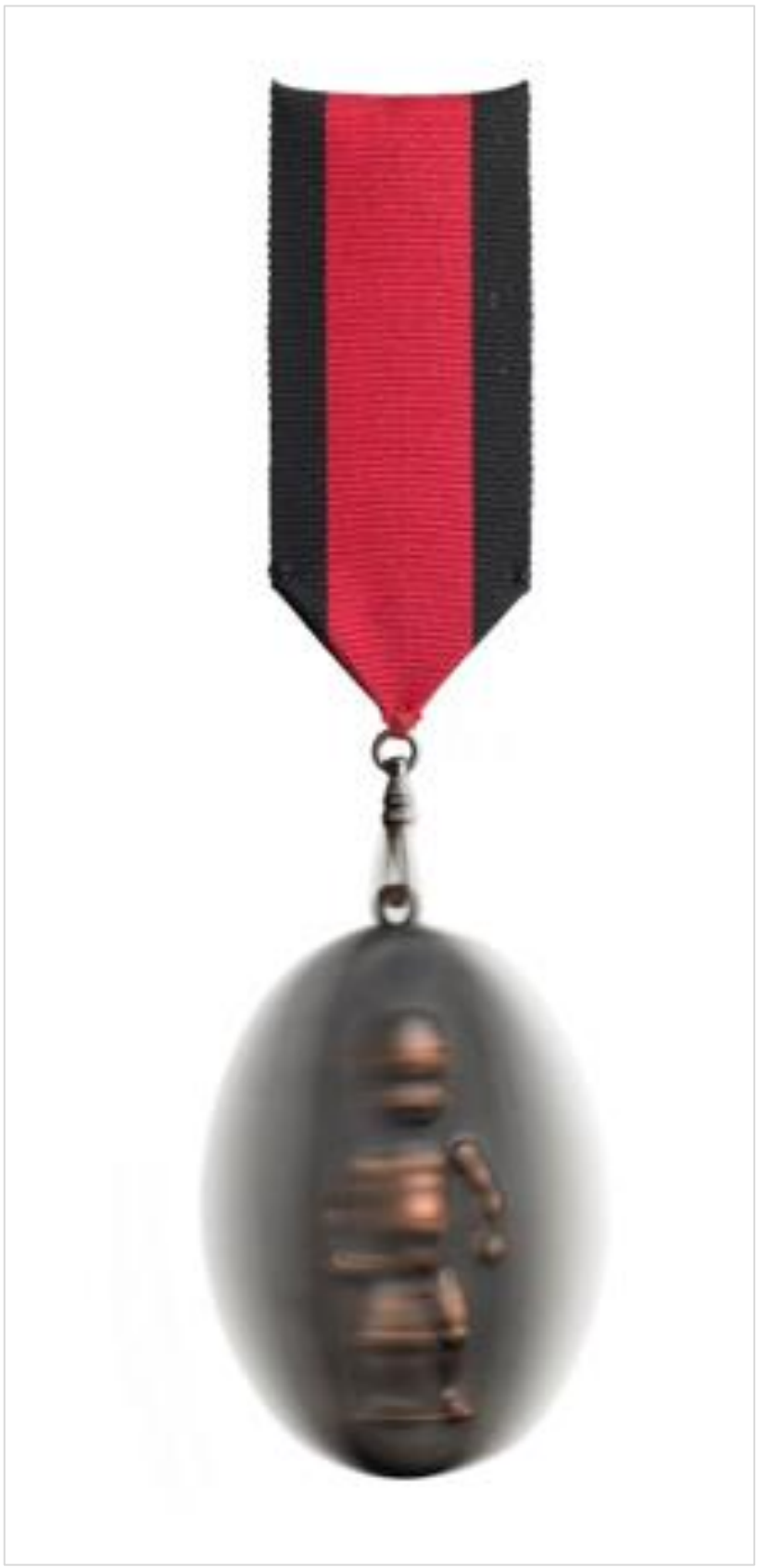
20. Alexandre Charpentier, *Door Furniture,* c.1900

21. Alexandre Charpentier*, Mother nursing her baby*, 1899, 81mm x 52mm, struck bronze, obverse, biface plaquette (reverse shows a young woman in profile).

22. Cathie Pilkington *Jumping Jack*, 2011, 69mm x 50mm, struck bronze and ribbon

23. Cathie Pilkington, *Jumping Jack*, 2011, 69mm x 50mm, struck and painted bronze and ribbon

24. Cathie Pilkington, *Majolica*, 2007, 730 x 400 x 320 mm, ceramic, gloss and oil paint



25. Cathie Pilkington, *Jumping Jack*, 2011, spinning, struck bronze and ribbon, 69 x 50mm

26. John Jaques & Son *Happy Families*, 1910

27. Cathie Pilkington, *Amulet (1)*, 2011, obverse, plaster and oil paint, 100mm x 70mm

28. Felicity Powell, *Sleight of Hand*, 2011, single channel video installation

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29. Felicity Powell, *Sleight of Hand*, 2011, single channel video installation

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30. Felicity Powell, *Bees*, 2009, wax on slate mirror back, 200mm diameter

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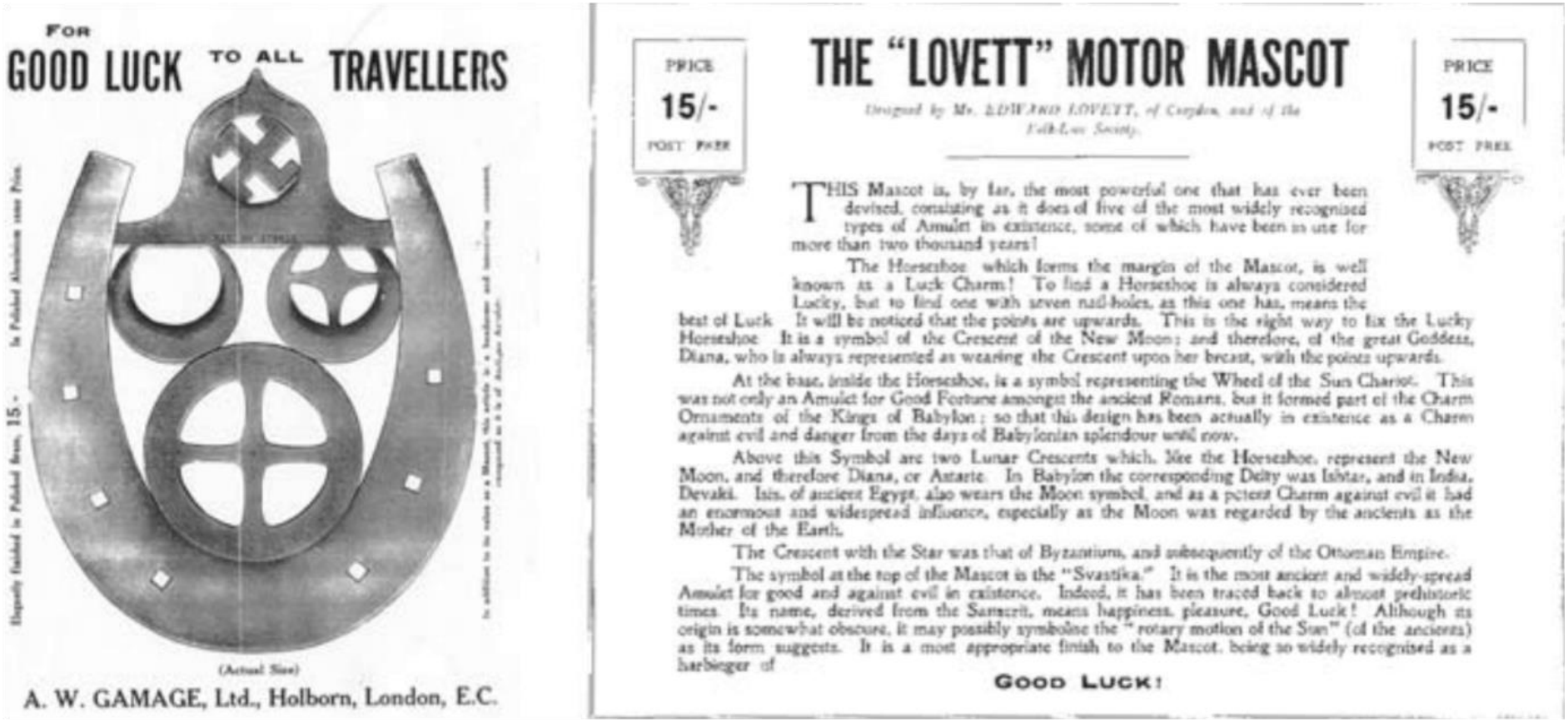
31. Anna Morandi, *Self-Portrait*, 1750-1755, wax and mixed media

32. Anna Morandi, *Sensitive Hands*, 1755, wax and mixed media



33. An advert for the “Lovett” Motor Mascot

34. Edward Lovett, *The "Lovett Motor Mascot"*, 1912, aluminium, 160 x 120 x 20mm

35. Three First World War charms from the Edward Lovett collection

36. Felicity Powell, *John Charles Robinson Medal*, 2002, obverse and reverse, cast bronze, 115mm diameter

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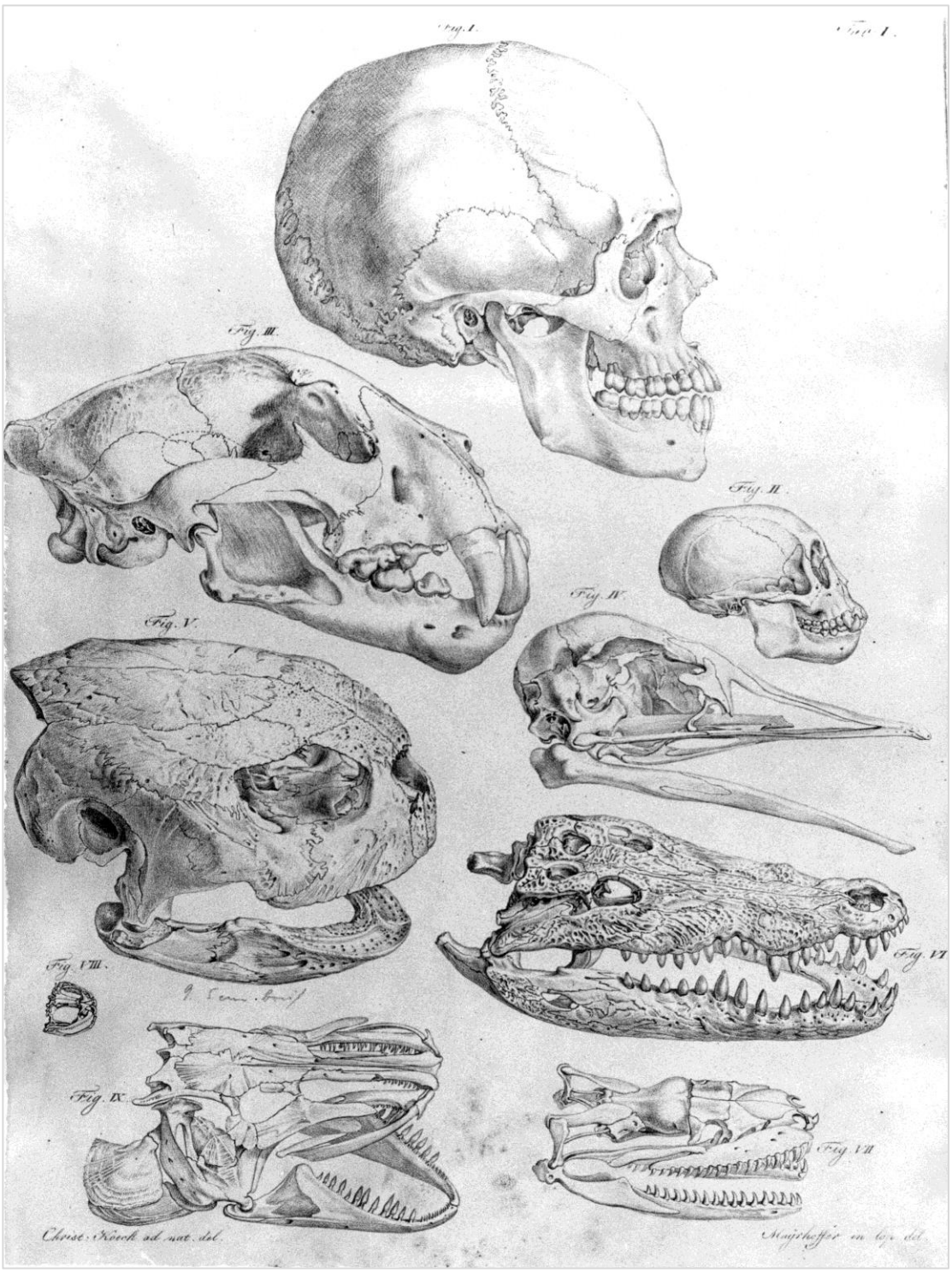
37. Chloe Shaw, *This Living Hand*, 2011, obverse, cool, cast bronze and thermochromatic paint, 48mm diameter

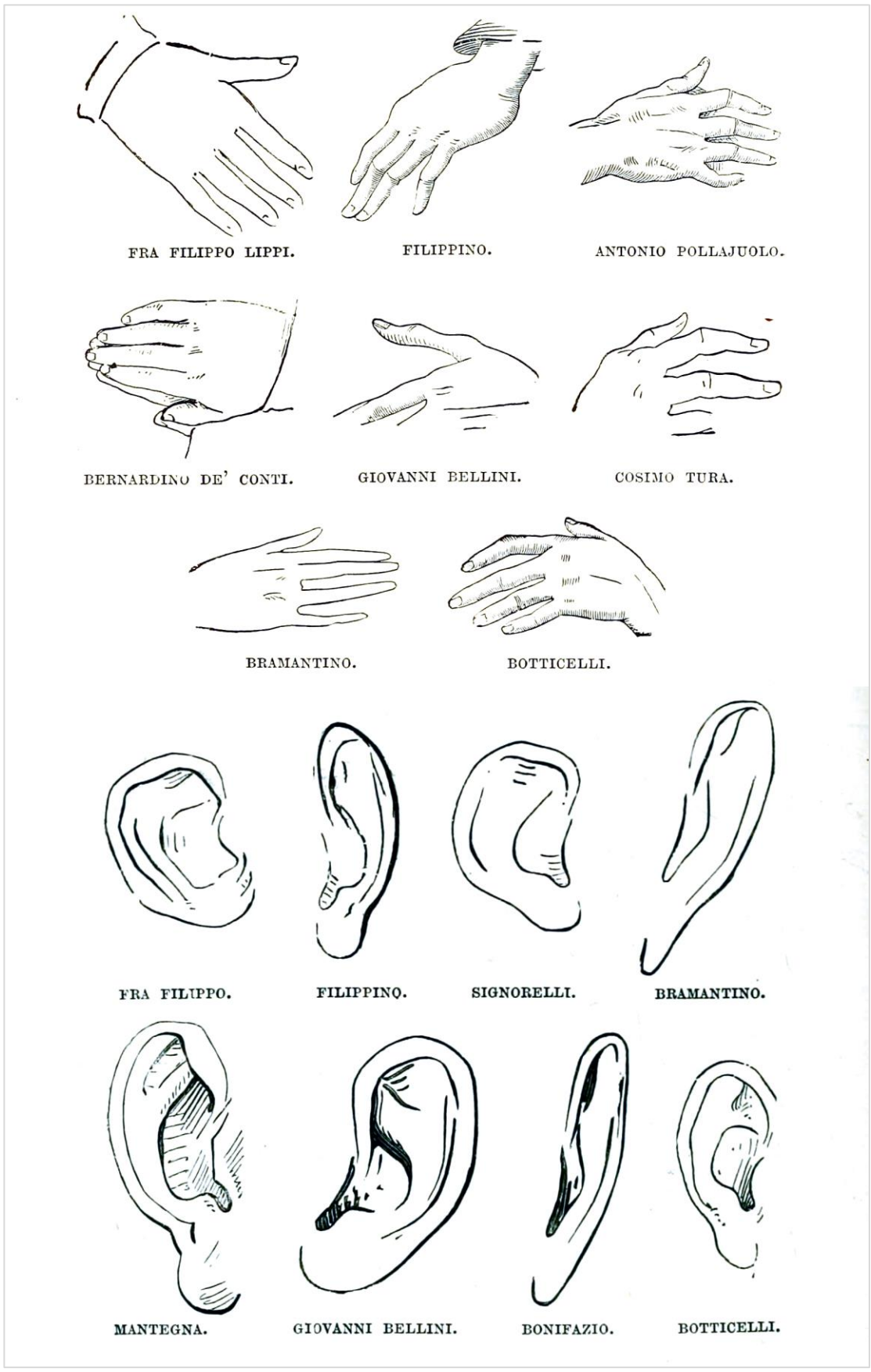
38. Chloe Shaw, *This Living Hand*, 2011, edge, cool

39. Chloe Shaw, *This Living Hand*, 2011, left: cool, right: same face, warm

40. Nicholas Hilliard, *Elizabeth I*, 1589, chased gold, 44mm diameter

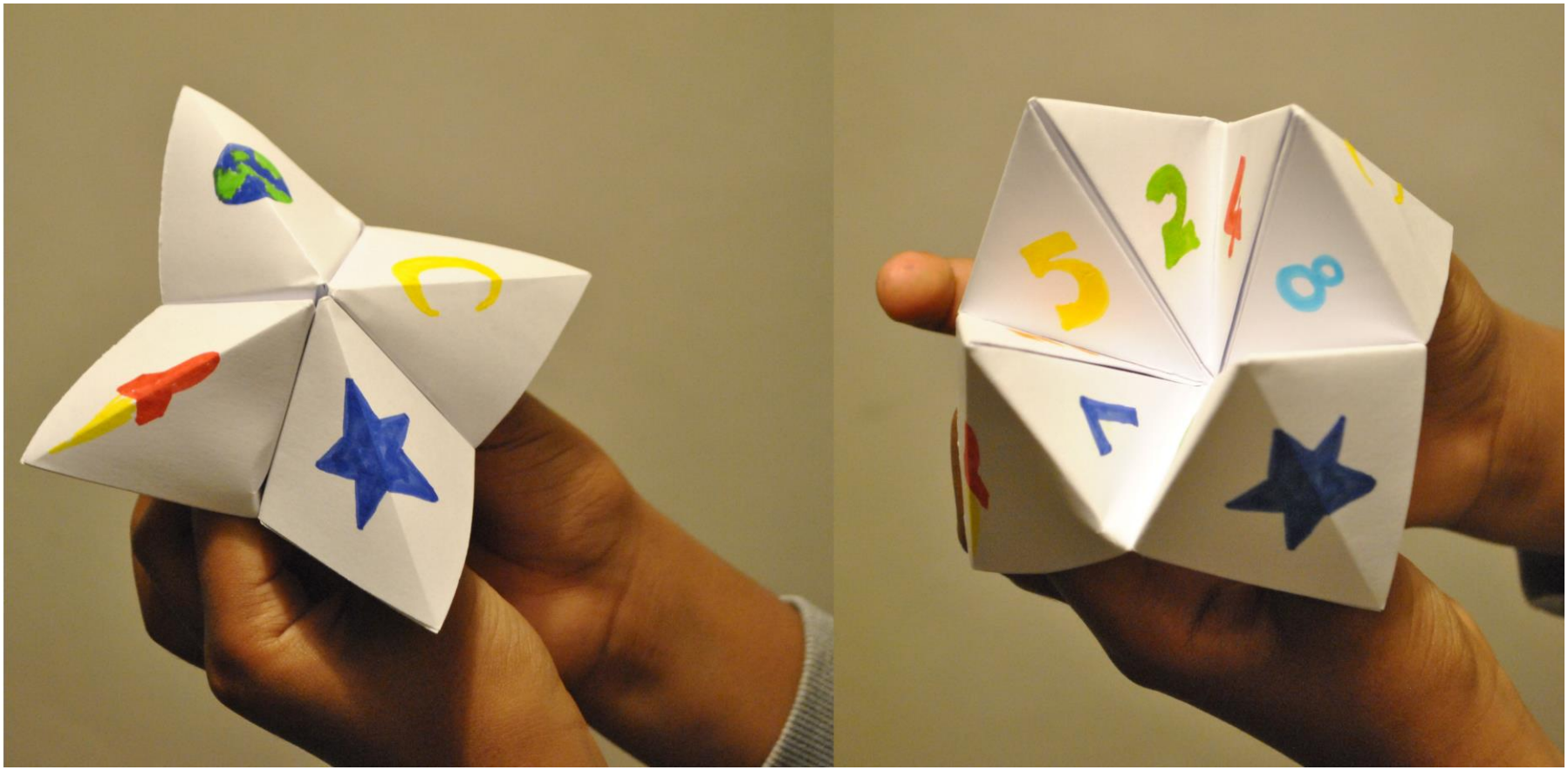


41. Johann Baptist von Spix *Cephalogenesis, Table 1*, 1815, lithograph



42. Giovanni Morelli, *Typical Hands* and *Typical Ears, Table 1* from Morelli (1892)

43. *Bronze Amulet*, 4-5 century CE, cast bronze, 53mm diameter



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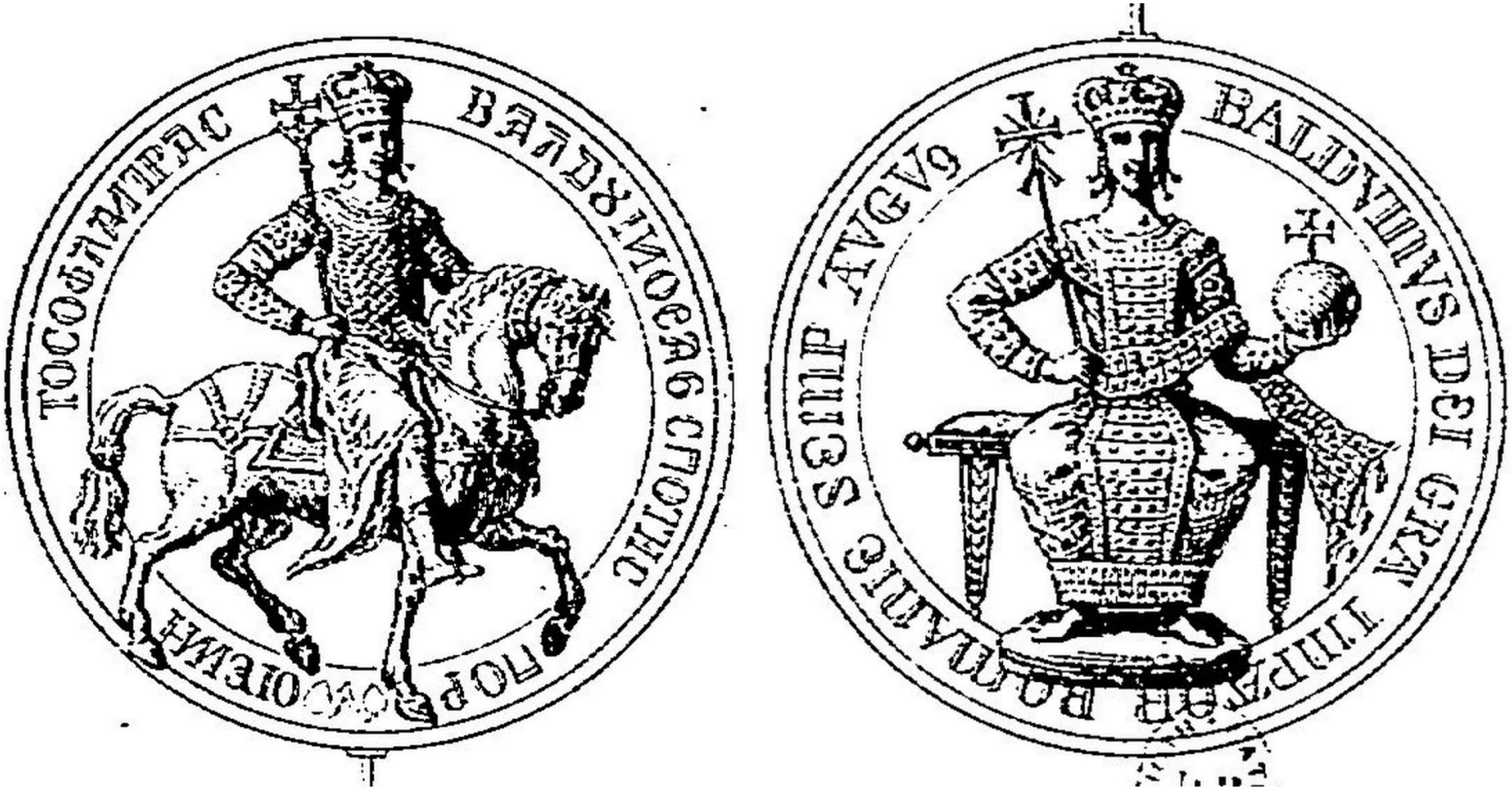

49. Etching of a *Seal of Baldwin II,* from Morand, S-J. (1790:plate following 68)

50. *Constantine the Great,* 1402, detail

51. City of Corby, *Seal of Corby*, 1228

52. *Virgin and Child*, c.1415

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54. *Seal of Jean de Berry, Count of Mâcon,* 1367, France

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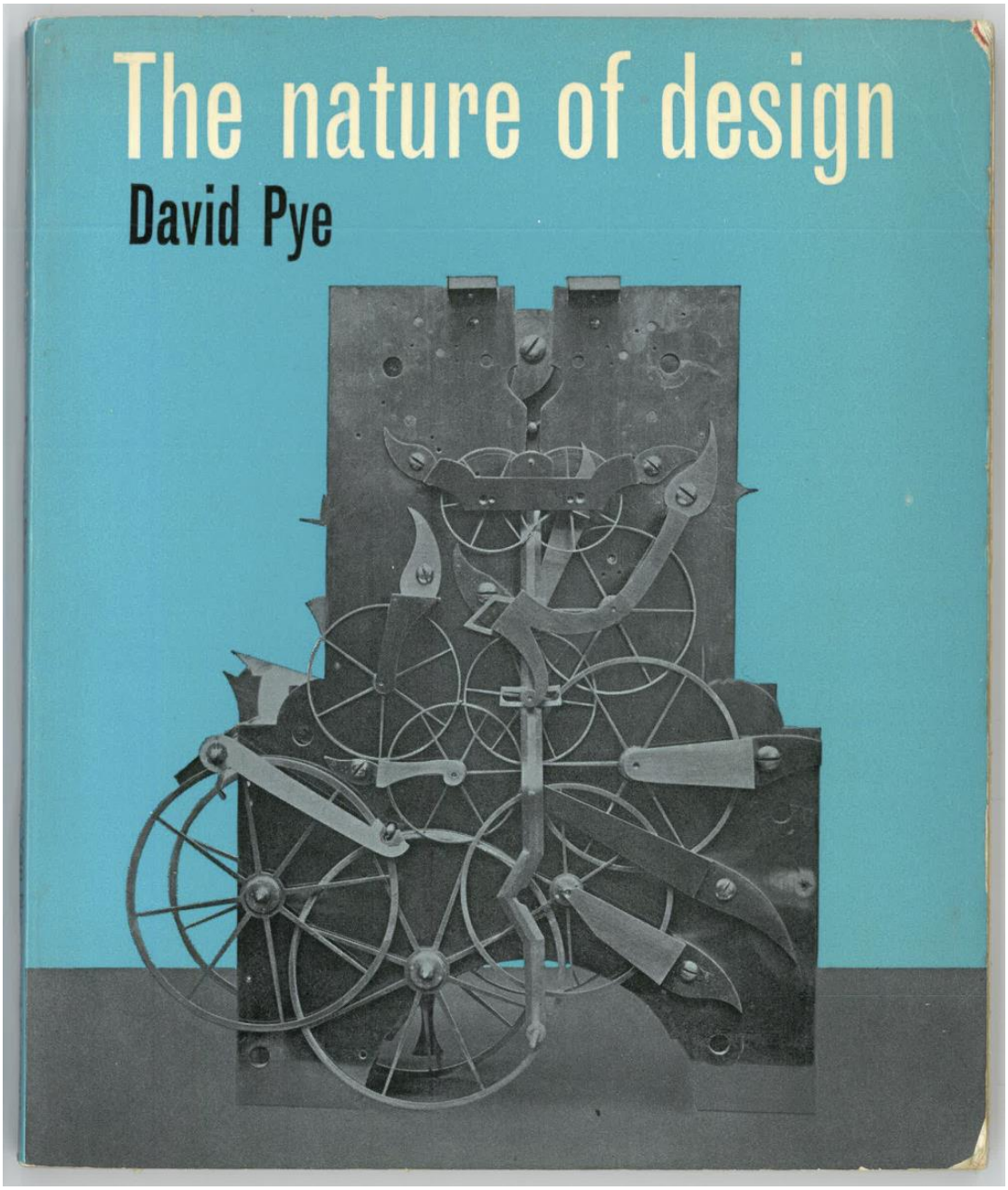

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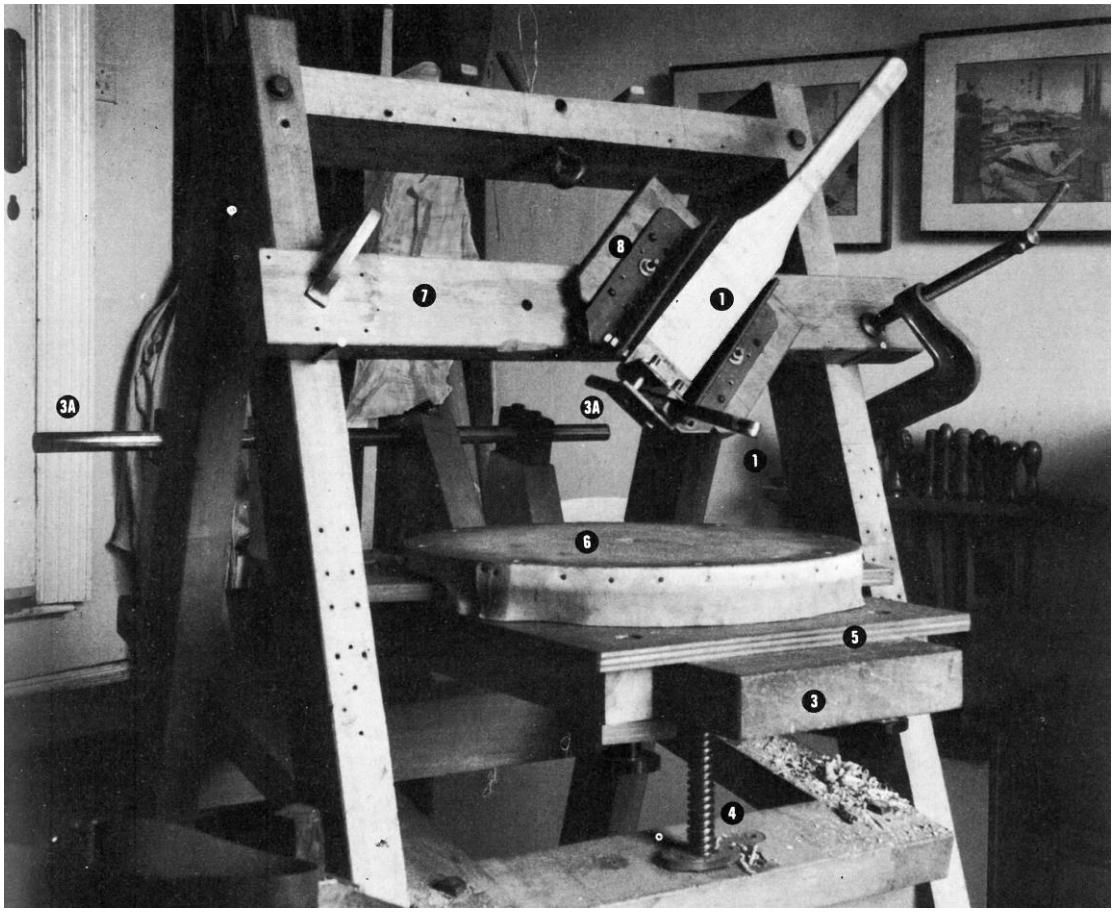

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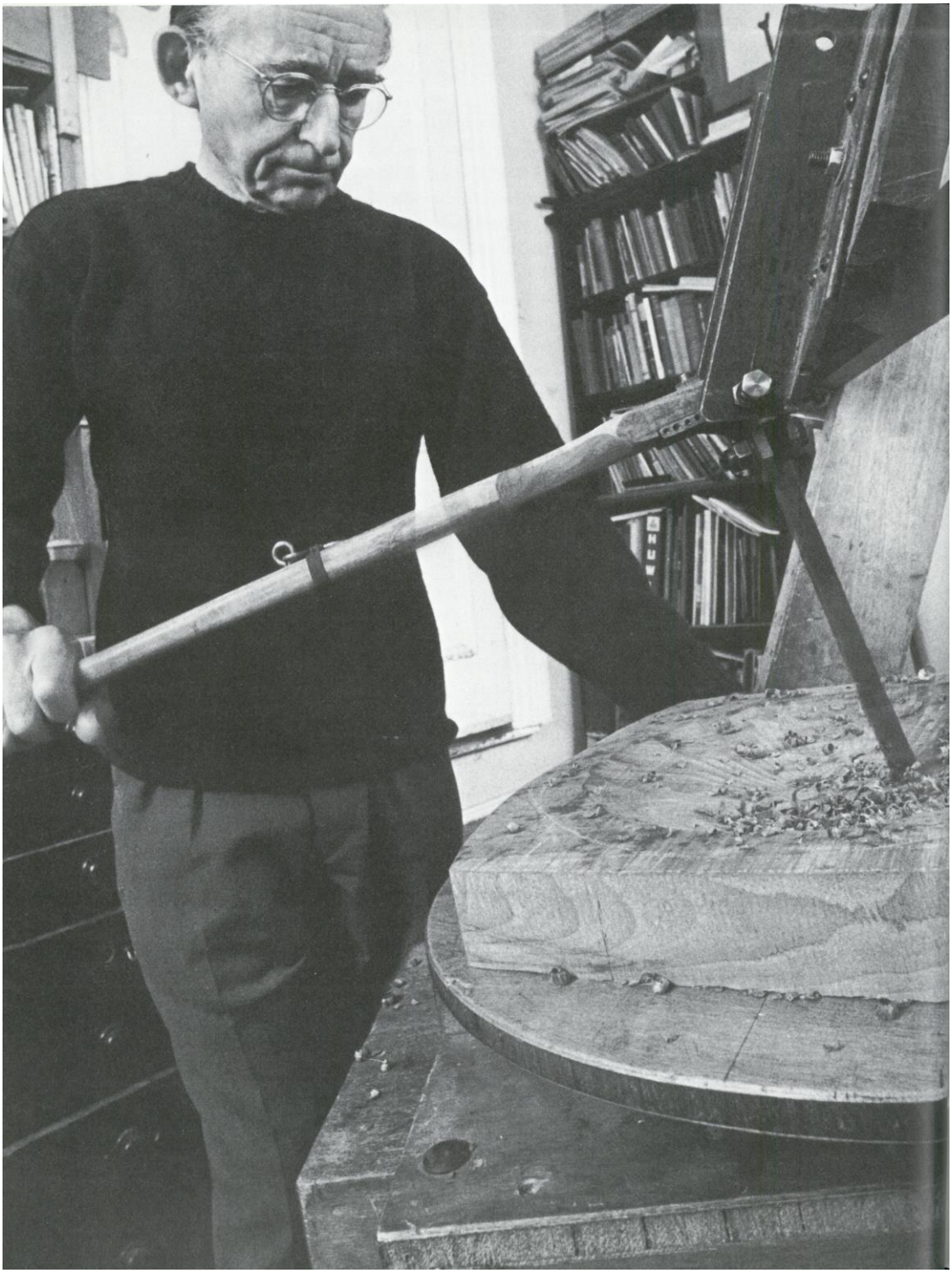

66. David Pye operating the Fluting Engine